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# *The FISHES of ACHIEVEMENT*

*FRANK J. RUSSELL*

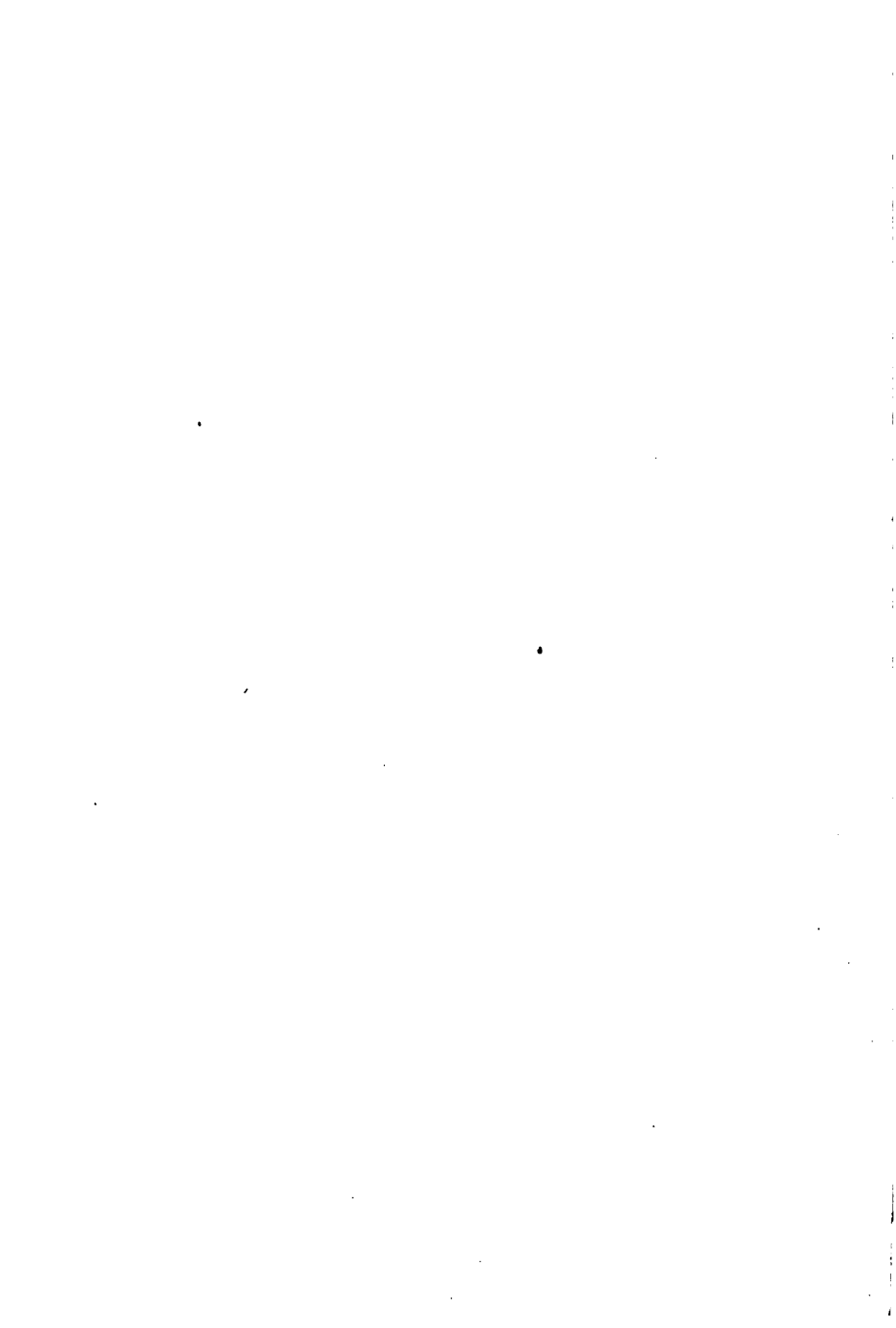


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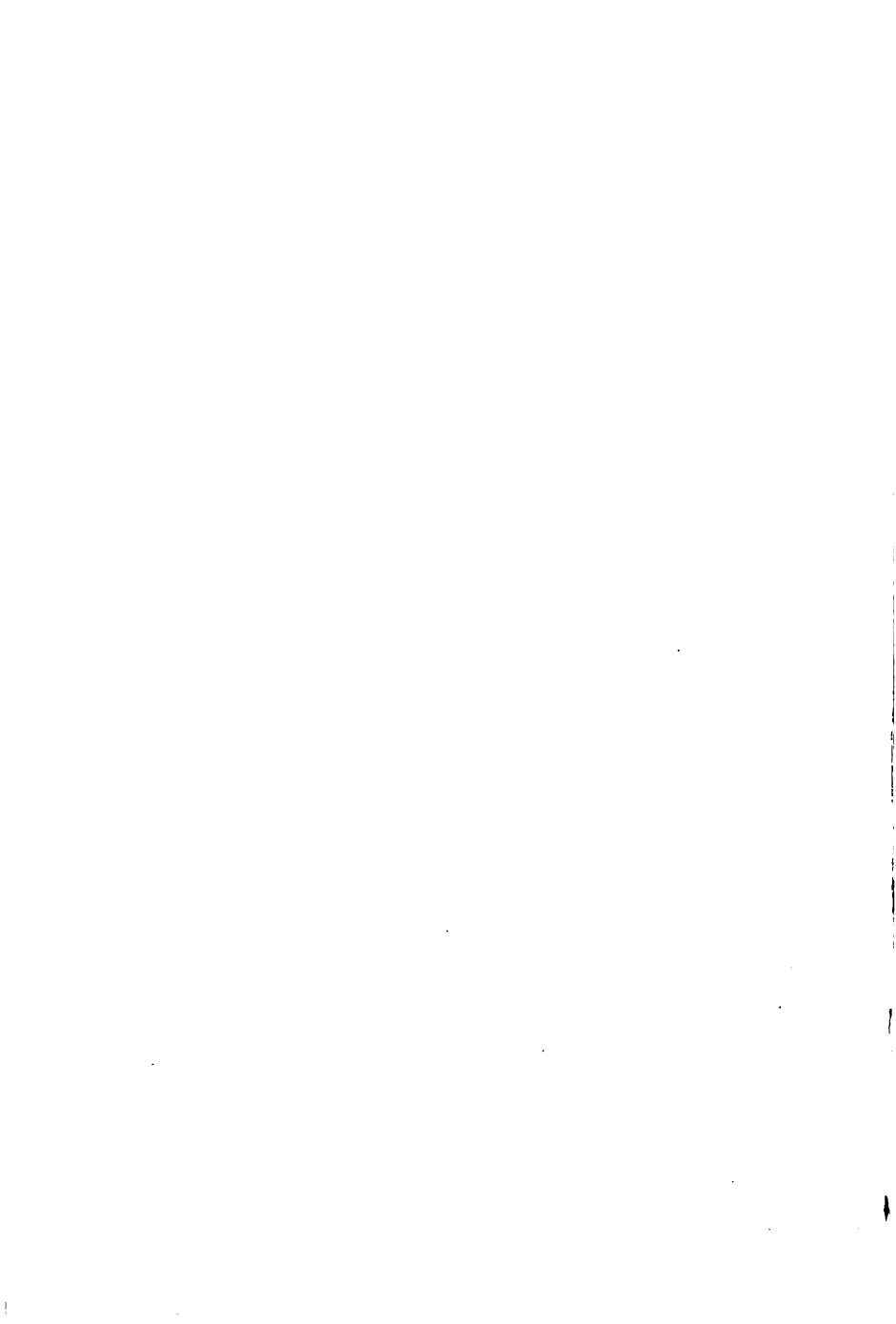




New  
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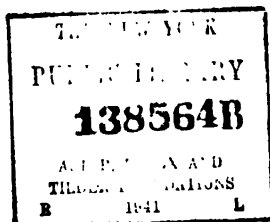
# THE ASHES OF ACHIEVEMENT

By FRANK A. RUSSELL



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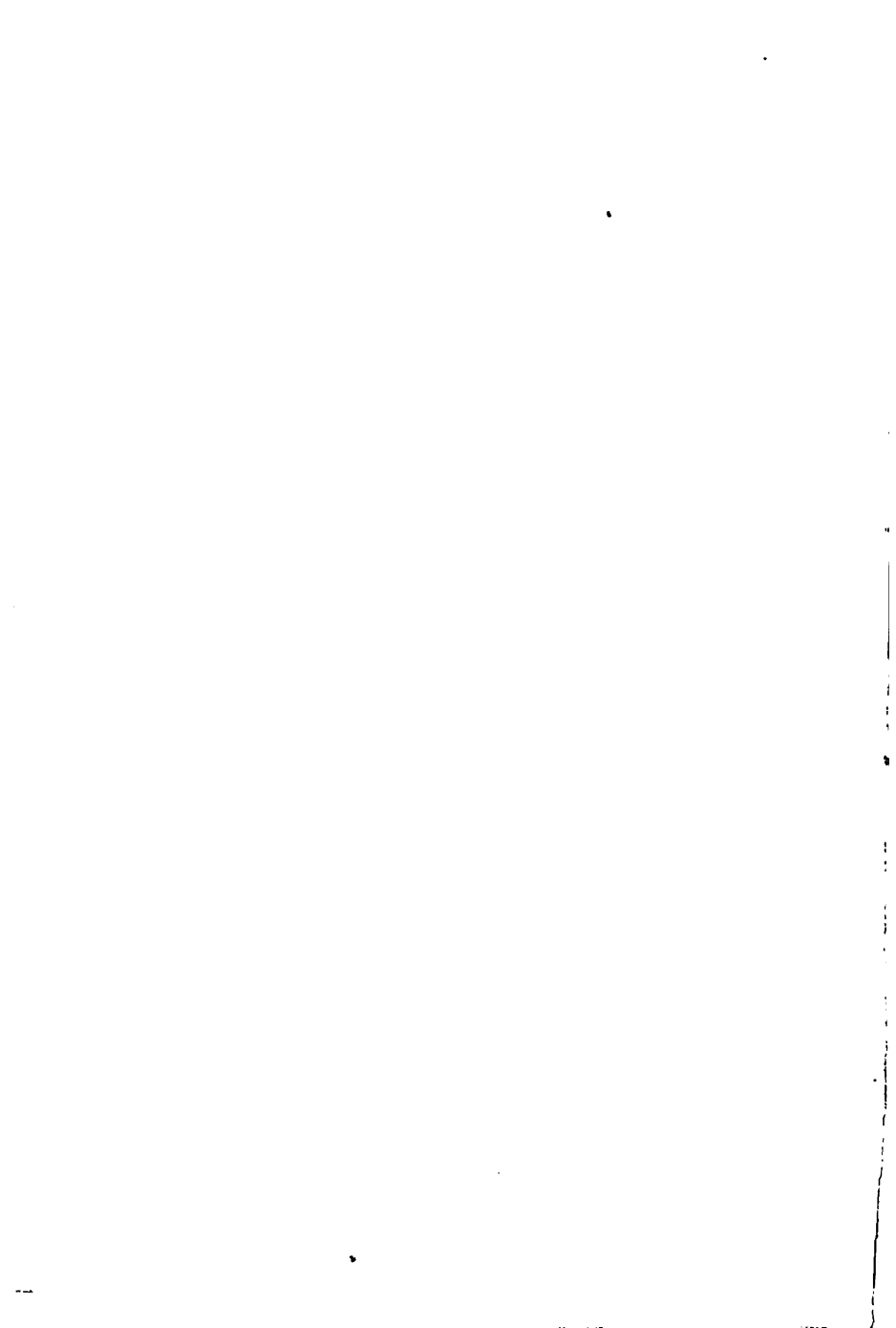
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**THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED  
BY THE MAN WHO WROTE IT  
TO THE MAN WHO WROUGHT IT**

1. 29





# THE ASHES OF ACHIEVEMENT

## BOOK I—SPARKS

### CHAPTER I

*"The Lamp of our Youth will be utterly out; but we shall subsist on the smell of it, And whatever we do, we shall fold our hands and suck our gums and think well of it. Yes, we shall be perfectly pleased with our work, and that is the perfectest Hell of it!"*

—THE OLD MEN

THE road from Deniliquin, glimmers, gray and uninviting, across a changeless expanse of browned grass, like a soiled ribbon on a drab's hair. It narrows to a point miles ahead, with something like a promise of fulfilment, only to widen maliciously as you approach, to march endlessly on as before, dull and level, an exasperating highway.

Like a crawling insect the doctor's buggy crept across the plain. Dr. Payne would have indignantly questioned the word "crept," for he would never use a horse that could not do its level ten miles, and indeed the term is but a comparative one, for any progress seemed almost imperceptible in that country of vast distances.

The "clop-clop" of the horse was pleasantly muted in the dust, spirals of which slowly mounted into the still, hot air, and marked for miles the passage of the open buggy.

Odo Kent, two days off the English boat, looked about him curiously. Inwardly he was wondering how his old school chum could stand this grim monotony.

"Can't call it pretty," he pronounced.

The doctor grinned amiably at his guest.

"The Riverina, my friend," he retorted, "happens to be the finest sheep country in the world. Why demand prettiness as well? Don't be a glutton. You can get prettiness on a chocolate-box."

Kent smiled pleasantly.

"Oh, lash me with contempt, you breeder of sheep. But harken! When I look for the smile of God and find myself confronted by a staring sheep's head, I can't swallow my disappointment in the shape of mutton or wool, even if you tell me each is the finest in the world. I travel thousands of miles to find fresh beauty, and you drive me over a dust-heap; I utter a mild complaint, and you smother me with statistics. Go to!"

Payne laughed aloud.

"I'll promise you beauty and to spare. Oh, I'll make ample amends, my word-spinning friend. Good Lord! To think of little Bill Kent, that freckled little devil who made my cocoa at Harrow, blossoming out into a word-factory—a novelist, and famous, too, by George! When I read of the great Odo Kent, it never occurred to me to connect him with you. Your wire from Melbourne was my first hint. And why—in the name of sanity—why Odo? It sounds more like a scent than a name."

"Nevertheless it happens to be one of mine—I naturally concealed the horrid fact at school," Kent replied, with just a hint of injury in his tones. A popular novelist seldom has a sense of humor; it so rarely survives the blighting breath of popularity.

"Well, you've certainly made it damned acceptable on the cover of a book," Payne made instant amends, sensing his blunder. "You and this new fellow Kipling seem to divide honors. What do you think of him, by the way?"

"Nothing lasting. A trifling chap who happens to have set a fashion," was Kent's judgment. "In five years nobody will read him—he's too raw, too crude."

"H'm! I'm an ignorant blighter myself. Like him immensely. Well, we'll give you copy for the new book.

Just give us a hint of the game you're after, and we'll arrange a drive of the characters that come nearest the mark. I'll say this—they come in all shapes and sizes in Australia. Why, the very man I'm going to see now is a regular freak—ought to be in a book."

The novelist became alert.

"Who is he?"

"Chap named Lee—John Pascoe Lee, to be precise," replied Payne.

"What's wrong with him?" Kent wished to know, having in mind his host's profession.

"He's been badly mauled by the cogs of a machine he was pitched into," he replied, with a smile in the corners of his twitching eyes.

"Good Lord! Is he badly hurt? How horrible!"

The smile grew to the characteristic grin, never long absent from the doctor's face.

"Pretty badly hurt, I should say. But you'd be a better judge than I."

"I?" echoed the mystified novelist.

"Yes, the injury is psychological—or rather moral," Payne explained, gravely.

"But you said a machine——," began Kent. Payne interrupted with a big, jolly laugh.

"Metaphorically, my dear Bill, metaphorically speaking. He got chewed up nine or ten years ago in the unwieldy English machine, known as primogeniture. I was trying to be funny," he confessed, "a rotten habit of mine, part of a bedside manner, so to speak. Seriously though, this fellow Lee will interest you. He's a perfect example of a man living in a country and yet existing outside of it."

"I don't understand," confessed Kent.

"And I'm not sure I can explain," said Payne.

"Why, you're an Essex man. You must have known of the Lees—they own that great, ugly barn just outside Middleham. Rather big pots——"

"Of course—Sir Everard Lee; he died some years ago. His youngster inherited."

"That's the man. That youngster kicked this John

Lee from Middleham to Riverina—magnificent boot. Well, that's the story."

"Very bald sort of story. Where does this machine come in? And what have I to do with it, in any case?"

"Oh, you want embroidery, do you? Well, we've got ten miles more to do, so I'll spin the yarn," Payne said.

"How do you come to be posted?" asked Kent.

"My sister was nursing Sir Everard for five years. Her version has been amplified by Lee himself, who never tires of telling his wrong. So I have it pretty pat."

And as the horse held its even pace over the dusty road, Dr. Payne told John Lee's story.

Any explanation of Philip Lee that left his parents out of account would be as complete as a jigsaw puzzle with the key-piece missing.

John Lee and his wife were violently uprooted from their natural soil, and transplanted to what, for them, was the uncongenial ground of Australia. They failed to acclimatize themselves, because they surrounded themselves with the atmosphere of that English home from which they had been driven. Prejudice and indulgence worked subtly on their natures, and possibly reacted on Philip's.

As Dr. Payne had indicated, the Lees were the victims of a system. Eton and Oxford were integral parts of it. As a young man John went up to Oxford, not from any slightest desire to make a career, but merely to do one of the things his position in life ordained, as nephew and heir of a baronet, who had weathered sixty years of life as a bachelor, and who daily congratulated himself on a feat, which, properly regarded, was at least as great a compliment to the innate good sense of women as to his own wariness.

After a somewhat turgid agricultural experience with wild oats, John, to the surprise and mild scandal of his compeers, developed an enthusiasm for work, and passed

out of Oxford with a fairly good degree and an almost indecent desire to amount to something.

He ran early against his first stone wall. He found a career made for him—that of being heir to a very exigent old gentleman with a partiality for shifting his troubles on to the nearest shoulders. He needed John, and scouted any idea of a career as unworthy. John rebelled, but forty thousand a year in reversion has a certain persuasive power, and there are not wanting arguments for regarding the management of such a sum as a career in itself. John succumbed, and hitched himself on to a procession, consisting of two nurses, a doctor, a man used to lifting stout old gentlemen from couches to carriages, a courier versed in language, gesticulation, speculation and the coinages of Europe. With this entourage he traversed Europe from Spa to Spa, never losing hope that incessant travel must eventually weaken a frame on which gout, ill-temper, and the usual etceteras had already made inroads.

With alternating systole and diastole of hope and despair, according to the exasperating fluctuations in his uncle's health, John followed the scent of iodoform across Europe. During a happy fortnight in Baden, when Sir Everard's life was hanging by a thread, the heir fell in love. Things were coming his way. Life was beckoning with rosy fingers. To those who are surprised that Love could flourish in an atmosphere of iodine and ether, not to speak of red flannel, it may be curiously replied that Love is mad enough for anything.

Sir Everard, calculating that he could dismiss a nurse if John married, gave his consent. Cicely Mainwaring, pretty, inconsequent, charming, was quite willing to believe herself in love with a prospective baronet with a rent-roll that was a scandal to Socialists. John, thirty-three, and extraordinarily unsophisticated since he had gone a-harvesting that sad crop of oats in his first year at Oxford, felt an urge of the senses that was easily mistaken for a *grande passion*. He had no friends to whisper a warning that the lovely Cicely was not equal

to a long road and a hard year. If there had been, he would have had his answer pat; he was not going to travel such a road.

Seven years passed. John was forty when the blow fell. Sir Everard did the incredible thing—the impossible thing—the inevitable thing, as John sourly told his wife afterwards. He married, or, rather, he converted the rather captious transient nurse into a permanent. Of course, she was a designing minx; that goes without saying. In icy, well-bred, carefully-thought-out phrases, Cicely told her exactly what she thought of her. Lady Lee smiled. She could afford to.

Still there was no reason for despair. A jointure subtracted from forty thousand still leaves pickings. Common-sense comforted them. They were still heir-apparents. It was certain old Sir Everard could never have children.

Common-sense betrayed them. Physiological impossibilities must give way to august English law, which decrees, in the face of the strongest evidence that a child born in wedlock is of a husband's begetting. Useless to demonstrate the contrary—futile to bandy words with the smiling mother, secure in the very face of assaulting scandal. Sir Everard, proud beyond measure, held in his arms a year after his wedding a boy, strong and vigorous, whose lusty legs had successfully kicked the Lees out-of-doors.

Sir Everard gave scant ear to the late heirs. He was prepared to continue the allowance during his lifetime, grimly observing that he was willing to pay so much for his nephew's prayers for his continued health. To John's anguished inquiry as to what was to become of them, he blandly countered with a query as to where the devil his ambition had flown to. He then exhorted him to be a man.

A family council was held. After forty years of land-holding expectations, John's leanings were evident. Sir Everard, influenced no doubt by the distance and the difficulty of communications, offered to buy a station in Australia, if John would go out. So it was decided.

The estate was bought, far down in the wonderful southlands of New South Wales. Not beautiful, as Kent had remarked, save perhaps to an eye that sees deeper than mere surface colors and contours, the Riverina is nevertheless a delectable land of wide rich plains, and rolling downs, carrying countless flocks; possessing wealthy, well-built towns, where Wool is staple and Sheep is King. Here are to be found, in stately homes, some of the richest squatters in Australia, with feet firmly planted in fatness, equally distant from the two largest Australian cities.

One would have thought that the Lees would have been happy in this Land of Promise. Mrs. Lee, a woman of violent enthusiasms and as violent reactions, began by declaring that at last she lived! Here, in Arcadia, she could develop her real self. She tried it for a month, and then her facile passion seized on a new project. She conceived the idea of making the desert blossom as the rose. With careless extravagance she wired for an expert from Melbourne, and an orgy of sowing and budding commenced. Knowsley Park bloomed into beauty.

Knowsley Park! The name is an index of the mind that produced it. John Lee never forgave the country of his adoption the fact that he was forced on its hospitality. The people who, with ready Australian kindness, bore them off to visit them in their homes were forced to listen to the better methods that prevailed in the old world. His stiff-necked English prejudices, which most newcomers find melt quickly away in the warm, genial, generous sunlight of Australia, remained with him to the end of the chapter. He was distant to his men, paying on all occasions the rôle of the old English squire, blind to the mirth he excited. He made the blunder of thinking the sturdy fellows who did his work were Australian peasantry. Now there is no such thing as an Australian peasantry.

It excited laughter when the name of Knowsley Park was given to the place which the district always had known as "Wirregulla." But when the mistress, play-



ing the part of Lady Bountiful to her husband's Squire, carried to the independent and prosperous homes of the village people gifts of her own superfluities, with a demand for inspection of the premises so that she might pass upon their cleanliness, the sounding name suggested a corruption which stuck to the Lees. "Nosey Parkers" was the generic term by which the "Wirregulla" people became known, and though the years corrected the foolish mistakes of inexperience and prejudice, and the feeling of the people changed to something like affectionate contempt, the nickname never altered.

Philip was born in 1887, just after the famous garden had been finished in front, and while the side area still remained to be done. It was time for a new enthusiasm, and the baby supplied the need in the very nick. The side garden was never finished.

That was Dr. Payne's introduction to the family, the latest member of which he had just successfully launched on a career. He watched the new father curiously, as he stood by the bed, looking down on his wife and the morsel she was cuddling. As John Lee looked, his face worked strangely. He was a queer-looking man. Youth had long departed from his face, scared by the old soul that looked out on the world through such jaundiced eyes. Commonplace in feature, a small nose took all character from his face. Time, not an artistic worker, had used his burin savagely, and engraved deep brown lines on either side of the insignificant nose; his eyes, brilliant still, and saving the face from banality, were sunk in cavernous depths; his hands, wrinkled prematurely, were those of a man who is fated not to grasp what he reaches for; they possessed that habit of the weak man, gripping each other behind his back, or resting, wrists outward, on the hips, a position always assumed by indetermined, irresolute men. Impatient eyebrows, constantly knitted, gave an air of irritation to the whole personality.

"What shall we make of him, John?" Cicely looked apprehensively at the irritable, nervously working face, and Payne looked at them both.

"He's born to the overlordship of more than a few rotten sheep," replied John. "If only the world hasn't a down on him, as it had on me, we'll make him a big man."

Afterwards Payne realized how characteristic the assertion was.

## CHAPTER II

*" 'How far is St. Helena from a little child at play!'*

*What makes you want to wander there with all the world  
between!*

*Oh, Mother, call your son again or else he'll run away.*

*(No one thinks of winter when the grass is green!)"*

—A ST. HELENA LULLABY

**F**OURTEEN miles along the road, a pair of iron gates formed a break in the monotony of sheep-proof fencing, and a driveway, straight as the road itself, gave promise of a house somewhere off in the immensity of flatness. The drive was bordered with discouraged English trees, not yet tall enough for shade. They formed an intrusive note in the landscape.

The gates bore the name of the place, and Kent smiled as the incongruity struck him. The ornate, gilt, archaic lettering looked woefully out of place. The imagination of the novelist, great as it was, bogged violently as he tried to see in the flat, brown expanse, with its grazing sheep and shelter-belts of eucalyptus, any analogy to a park.

They drove along the avenue, which had suffered bereavement. Here and there, an oak, hurt and wondering at the unfitness of things, had given up the unequal struggle; stiff, dead branches starkly reminded the beholder that the strength of which the oak is a synonym may only be attained by careful selection of soil and adequate treatment.

"There's a lesson for Lee in those confounded trees," remarked Payne, when Kent had given expression to an idea like the foregoing. "His boy is an Australian, and requires Australian handling; instead, it's long odds he will be made into a little English prig."

"How old is he?" inquired Kent.

"Let's see. He was born in eighty-six—no, it wasn't; it was in eighty-seven, the year of the big grass-fire. That would make him just on eight."

"How do you manage for education right up here, in this Back o' Beyond?" asked the other, curiously.

"Education! You've come to the proper shop for information," laughed Payne. "Behold me"—thumping himself on the chest—"chairman of the Board of Advice. I'm on the School Committee. I *am* the School Committee. And we've got the finest school in the State, and the finest teacher, too. Of course, you know that the State runs all primary education!"

"Oh, damn it, I didn't ask for a lecture. By Jove! that's pretty. That's really beautiful." Kent broke off to admire the prospect that had suddenly opened out, like a scene in a theater, so unexpected was it. The flatness had broken into gracious slopes. The drive fell steeply into a willow-planted billabong, dry at this time of the year. This ran out into a shallow, grassy valley. On the further side of this, stood the house, a wooden bungalow, half hidden by pines and more English trees, sturdy, big fellows these, well-fed and watered.

Kent's enthusiasm increased as they approached the place, through white gates that ushered the road into the garden.

The latter screened the house on two sides, apparently embowering it wholly in flowers. Roses, roses—and yet again roses, in a riot of color and scent! They swarmed everywhere in unkempt masses, trailing treacherous, thorny beauty over the paths; climbing triumphantly over espaliers originally meant for fruit, which had long since succumbed to *force majeure*; lifting thence unpruned branches to heaven in defiance of all seemly gardening; blooming uproariously where no blooms should be, like high-spirited children escaped from a tired governess—very Bolsheviks of roses, carrying their masked loveliness and intruding beauty wherever order and good governance forbade.

A gardener would have gazed grimly, and then,

dropping his useless tools, he would have blasphemed; an artist would have straightway gat him to pigments and brushes; a lover to praising. Odo Kent gazed with ravished eyes, as if he would fill his soul with the gorgeous and lawless spectacle. Then his eye traveled to the further side of the building. Tonzled ugliness met his gaze. Payne laughed at his ludicrous consternation.

"Our enthusiasm gave out before we got to that," he explained. "Also we had our baby. It is eight years ago, but our enthusiasm has never traveled backwards yet. Ours is a single-track mind. We don't stop for shunting."

"But it's a positive eyesore. Why doesn't Lee do something?"

"Lee wouldn't notice if the whole place were like that. He is a sojourner in a land of exile. When his sheep pay well enough to enable him to buy a place in England, where the County people will call, he'll up-stakes here and get him homewards. Pathetic, isn't it?"

They had skirted the weedy beds, driving over the flowers which had sown themselves in careless profusion on the very drive itself, and Payne pulled up in front of the bungalow, which rose out of the tangled mass like a Gulliver beset by hundreds of clinging Lilliputian hands. It was flanked by deep, shady verandahs, whose original purpose of rest was sadly interfered with by sinuous, spiky branches of the ubiquitous roses, which, for lack of room to climb, had elected to crawl. At the side, a high tank, raised on perilous wooden stilts, and fed by a windmill which clanked drearily in the fitful gusts of hot summer breeze that intermittently turned the creaking vanes, peered above the roof.

As the buggy stopped, their arrival was noted. A French door opened, and a woman stepped out on the verandah. Kent had time to note an air of distinction, and an unusual beauty, before he turned away to avoid the suspicion of staring.

"How do you do, Mrs. Lee?" Payne called out, as he sprang over the wheel. "Got your message to come over. Nothing wrong with the boss, I hope. Oh,

pardon me, may I introduce Mr. Odo Kent? He's the writing chap, you know; but before he did that he was my fag at Harrow."

The booming, genial stream of nonsense bubbled on, and Kent had time to note now the play of feeling on a face that was singularly expressive of every passing ripple of emotion. When the doctor alluded to Lee as "the boss," a quick frown apprised the attentive observer in the background that the cavalier allusion to her husband was not considered humorous. At his own introduction, he came forward and took the hand that was held out to him. She stood on the top step of the verandah, and he three steps lower, so that her outstretched hand was presented to him with almost a regal gesture. He had an absurd impulse to kiss it, in an elaborate greeting. Some women liked it; it was courtly; it was foreign. He decided not to risk it.

"Mr. Kent! I am very pleased you came. Indeed I know your books well. To meet a celebrity in these wilds is as pleasing as it is rare. Please come into the cool, if there is any cool this terrible day. My husband is somewhere about."

As she spoke, she led the way into the house. It struck Kent, who was very keen to note social *nuances*, that Payne and his boisterous humor were not particularly popular at Knowsley Park. His own welcome had subtly marked him out as different social material from the local doctor.

Payne greeted Lee in a loud, friendly fashion, as he stepped into the dark drawing-room.

"Hullo, hullo. Who's sick? Here I drive out on one of the hottest days in January, and can't even make expenses for my journey. Well, I'll have a drink, anyway. I want you to meet Mr. Kent, friend of mine, just in from the old country. He's a novelist, but that won't convey anything to you, Lee. You tell me you never read, so I'm sure Kent's books won't tempt you. They're awful—those horrible popular things, don't you know."

Lee took the doctor's jocularly in heavy, stolid, unen-

couraging silence. He shook hands with Kent, with courtesy. One of Payne's statements had evidently been noted. He picked it out, like a grain of wheat from so much chaff.

"From England? I'd be glad to have a long talk with you. After the infernal flatness of Australian vowels, I'll be glad to hear real English again. In the meantime, I've got some business with Payne. P'raps you'd like to see the garden. 'Fraid Mrs. Lee will be engaged with me for a time, but you may like to wander round by yourself a bit."

Perceiving that he was being dismissed, Kent rose with alacrity.

"Certainly, I was entranced with the garden, as we drove in. It's just a dream," he said, with warmth.

"A hobby of mine," murmured Mrs. Lee. "We won't be long, Mr. Kent. Perhaps you and the doctor will stay and have some tea, and drive back in the cool?"

She led him from a dark room through another French window into the brilliant sunshine. He blinked rapidly, like an owl. When he could look up without distress, he found he was alone. The French window was shut. Without more ado he strolled off into the tangle and began to enjoy himself as only a flower-lover can.

Some minutes later he looked up, with the uncanny conviction that eyes were watching him. At first he could see nothing to account for the feeling. Then, behind a thick screen of dead fruit branches, matted with rose boughs, he perceived two eyes.

"Hullo!" he said.

"Hullo!" the eyes replied.

Kent felt a queer embarrassment. The beginning of the conversation was not encouraging. An impulse to walk unconcernedly away, pretending preoccupation, was rejected. He looked up again. The eyes were still on him, bright, large eyes, full of intelligence, full of questioning. He essayed a brilliant query.

"Who are you?" he asked. Like an echo his ques-

tion was thrown back at him. This verbal tennis would soon get on his nerves. He made an effort.

"My name's Kent. I'm a friend of Dr. Payne. Won't you come out and talk to me? What's your name, in the first place?"

"Philip Pascoe Egerton Lee," the voice that belonged to the eyes made precise answer, with an old-fashioned exactitude that the other found infinitely charming. A moment later Philip made up his mind that his refuge was unnecessary. He came out of hiding, and stood revealed as a boy of eight, absurdly and unnecessarily beautiful, straight and sturdy, with two steady eyes, unscreened now by rose leaves, gazing with the innocent curiosity of boyhood at the stranger.

"Ah, that's better. Now we know each other. I haven't imposing names like yours. You can call me Mr. Kent."

"Mister Kent," the boy dutifully echoed, and his voice was very free from that flatness of which his father had complained as being an Australian characteristic. "What's imposing?"

Kent entered on an explanation, only to find that the child was hopelessly ignorant. There was such slender ground common to both, such as there must be between the teacher and the taught, that the man had to laugh off the strange embarrassment the boy caused. One thing impressed him—a weird charm that was not a thing of voice, of manner, of beauty, but which seemed to emanate from the whole personality of the tiny chap. Kent felt a most unusual interest in the child, enhanced by the knowledge he had gleaned from his friend Payne of the antecedents of the parents.

Whilst he was searching round for a topic which should draw Philip into conversation, Mrs. Lee came out on the verandah and called the boy. With a bright, affectionate smile of farewell, the youngster ran off. Interested, speculating on the Lees and their curious history, Kent strolled onwards.

In the drawing-room, as soon as he had left it, the atmosphere was suddenly electric. Payne had sensed



hostility when Mrs. Lee had first appeared, but he had not guessed the cause. Genial to a degree, his advice was sought in quite other than professional ways, and he was always at the service of those who required any sort of help. But there was another side of his character that people sometimes got a glimpse of, and seldom cared to repeat the experience. He possessed a straightforward, honest nature that dared to say exactly what he thought, careful only to avoid giving unnecessary pain; but let that man beware who thought that Payne could be bounced into doing something his own sense of decency or honesty condemned! The lightning of scorn was likely to blast him; the doctor's geniality would freeze; the kindly face would grow rigid, the easy voice cutting. Lee had had no opportunity to discover this. He was about to put his fingers into a wasp's nest.

As soon as the window closed on Kent, Payne turned inquiringly to Lee.

"Nothing wrong with the kid, I hope?"

"No. He's all right; that is to say, my dear Payne, I—we—Mrs. Lee and I, are both anxious about him." Lee's voice had that pompous note which one often finds in an Englishman, addressing one he thinks is slightly his inferior. Just as he was speaking, his wife returned from the garden. She heard her husband's last words.

"Oh, very anxious, doctor. We want you to say that he is not fit for any severe strain."

Payne looked from one to the other.

"What's it all about?" he asked. "Where's the youngster? If there is any mysterious illness, I bet I twig it quick enough. Is he in bed?"

"Oh dear no," came from Mrs. Lee. "It is merely precaution on our part. He's all right so far."

"Well, better let me judge for myself. All this sounds like a conspiracy. I feel like sinking my voice. Where the dickens is the kid?"

The big, booming voice was so little like sinking that it was raised to quite a loud pitch. Mrs. Lee gave a little, distressed moan, and put her hand to her head,

as if to indicate that she was suffering. The hint did not have its desired effect.

"I'll call him in, but really, doctor, it's unnecessary," she exclaimed. It was at this juncture she called Philip away from Kent, and brought him inside.

"Hullo, you young radical, and what have you been up to? Too much fruit, I suppose."

At the sound of his voice, Philip ran to him and sprang into his arms.

"Hooray! it's you," he cried.

"'Course it's me. Didn't you recognize Dandy outside?"

"Yes—besides the man told me he was your friend, but I can say 'hooray' when I see my very ownest friend, can't I?"

"You can say it all day. I'd be very proud. Now let's have a look at you. Feel all right?"

"'Course I do. I always feel all right, silly."

"You do. I'll say that for you. A healthier youngster I never did see. Here, give us a squint at your tongue."

Philip laughed aloud at this.

"Mum says you're the slingingest—no, the slangiest—man she ever saw. It's because you say 'give us a squint.' I'm not allowed to say it."

"So I am—the very worst man I ever met. Your mother's quite right. But that's because my education was neglected."

"What's that?" the boy asked.

"Mean to say you don't know? That shows yours is neglected, too," said the doctor. All the time he had been making a hurried examination of eyes, throat and nose. The Lees said never a word, but on the doctor's last remark Lee interposed.

"I never said there was anything wrong with the boy, Payne," he said, irritably. "For Heaven's sake stop that farcical business. Philip, leave the room. I want to talk to the doctor."

At the tone, Payne looked curiously at the speaker.

## 18 THE ASHES OF ACHIEVEMENT

Philip vanished, with a rare smile at his friend. Then the doctor turned to Lee.

"Now let's have the explanation," he said. "You seemed worried over something."

"Oh, we are, doctor, we are. We have just got a notice from the Government that Philip must go to school."

Payne laughed aloud—a sudden, immense gale of Homeric laughter that turned the faces of the absurd pair of Lees into black wrath.

"Good Heavens! What a terrible experience! Forced to educate your only child! Now, what in the world am I brought out fourteen miles for, because your boy has to go to school? Why in the name of all that's reasonable should he not go to school? He's the most charming ignoramus I've ever come across, if that's any comfort to you."

Lee said a few words to his wife in a low tone, and she sat down, with an air that gave him complete permission to deal with the matter.

"I don't think you understand the position, Payne. I have no intention of allowing my boy to attend the Government school in the village, with the sons of peasants. He's too young, anyway."

"The law says that every child of six shall go to school. It need not be the public school," said Payne.

"There is no other here," Lee explained. "Our choice becomes limited, you see."

"Get him a governess or a tutor, then," exclaimed the doctor bluntly.

"That is needless expense, especially when I want all the money I can lay my hands on for an experiment which, if successful, will enable us to take our proper position in England. I cannot consent to anything that will prejudice that."

"Then there's no remedy. He must go to the public school," declared the doctor.

"The law grants a loophole, Payne," suggested Lee.

"Well, let's see if you're small enough to crawl

through it, Lee," invited Payne, not without malicious intention in the double meaning his words bore.

"A doctor's certificate that the boy is not strong enough to go to school would give me a respite." Lee looked with bright eyes at Payne, who stood facing him.

"But the boy is as strong as a horse," he replied.

"Surely you'll do this to help us," Lee said.

"I've never committed perjury even to help myself, Lee," was the reply, and the eyes began to get a film of ice on them, which should have warned the other man. "You'll have to go through with it. What's so terrible about the public school? It's been the nursery of three-quarters of our best men."

"Do you think a Lee will herd with ploughboys and hobbledehoy's?" Lee asked, his tones raised, and his eyes flashing.

"There are ploughboys at the school, of course," assented the doctor; "but there are no hobbledehoy's. Not a boy there, from the tiniest upwards, who couldn't lick your boy's head off in everything that's worth doing."

"Do you include speaking the Queen's English?" inquired Mrs. Lee coldly. Her husband struck in.

"Yes. Do you consider it right to let my boy herd there with boys and girls like Jim Wister's, for instance? They say, 'It's a fine dy, Mr. Lee—fine for Austrilyer.' " He laughed angrily. The doctor laughed with him, in perfect enjoyment.

"Yes, you've made out a case against Wister's kids. That flat 'a' of the Australian child is ugly. But I'm going to bring you nearer home, Lee. You've made this an important question. It isn't, you know; but I'll take it on your own grounds. You stipulate for the Queen's English, but you've got to determine what that is. Is it what you talk, for instance?"

"I speak as an educated man, Dr. Payne. I want my child to do the same." John Lee was on stilts. He was being outraged by this vulgar fellow.

"No, you speak as an Oxford man, Lee. There's quite a difference. Listen. That is what you said just now. Listen closely, and tell me how it must sound to the ear

of the villager you laugh at." He repeated slowly a remark Lee had made a minute ago: "'Yas. Do you consider it raight to lat mai boy hard with boys and gals laike Jim Wister's theyah, for instance?' That was what you said, and is isn't the Queen's English."

"Damn your impertinence, Dr. Payne," sputtered Lee.

"You asked me to commit perjury, you know, Lee," put in Payne, smiling with his lips, but with his eyes quite frozen now. "I think you owed me a license to be impertinent in return for your suggestion. But I wasn't being impertinent. We were having a philological discussion, and I wanted to show you that quaint turns of speech and pronunciation are due only in part to education, much more to climate and environment."

"All I know is that if I only find out the interfering blackguard who sent information to the Education Department that Philip was not attending school, I'll have something to say—something to do. You needn't tell me the confounded fools in Sydney found it out off their own bat."

"I don't suppose so," returned Payne. "What could you do, if you knew?"

"I'd break every bone in his body," threatened Lee, looking very fierce.

"Please, John, don't talk that way," begged his wife.

"Just a minute, Mrs. Lee," said Payne; "perhaps Mr. Lee doesn't understand the system of education in this country?"

"I don't want to understand the rotten system," the infuriated man almost shouted.

"It's not a rotten system. It's one of the best in the world. And the best point about it is the one you object to. It is compulsory. Furthermore, the local affairs are administered by a committee, which sees that the intentions of the Government are not mocked. We have a man here who is entrusted specially with that duty. It was he who informed the Government of all children of school age in the district who were not in regular attendance."

"If you don't tell me his name, I'll find it out for myself," Lee blustered. Payne's face was a study in silent, icy contempt, as he looked at the raised fist and the congested brow.

"Oh, I'll tell you, Lee. It was the man you asked to forswear himself. It was myself. You did fall in properly, didn't you?"

### CHAPTER III

*"To the hush of the breathless morning  
On the thin, tin, crackling roofs,  
To the haze of the burned black-ranges  
And the dust of the shoeless hoofs—  
To the risk of a death by drowning,  
To the risk of a death by drouth—  
To the men of a million acres,  
To the Sons of the Golden South!"*

—THE NATIVE-BORN

PAYNE gained his point at the expense of friendship with the Lees.

For the next three years Philip rode his pony to the tiny village school, which, with the general store and post office and a few straggling houses, made up the settlement of Wandilla. A parental stop-watch was put upon his movements, however. He left the gate of the homestead at a fixed hour every morning, timed to reach his class as school was assembling. He had strict orders to leave as soon as the afternoon session had finished. This plan was considered to bring contamination to the vanishing point.

With the queer perspicacity of childhood, the position was quickly understood by the other children.

The tribe of Wisters—seven of them—who came to school packed tightly on two horses, knew no spiritual restraints, and recognized no class distinctions. Peter, the second Wister boy, who shared one of the horses with a brother and a sister, the latter in the middle for safety, was a freckled, good-tempered youngster of about the same age as Philip. He had a nature so dogged and determined that his fellows at the school, girls and boys, had learned to give way before it. He had never been known to bluster; bullying and he were as the poles

asunder; yet, when he set his mind on a thing, that thing came his way. To attack him physically was useless. He took punishment without flinching from older boys who thought that primitive methods must prevail. He faced them, as he faced life, solid and immovable, his square body firmly planted, a grin on his lips that humorously displayed a wide gap once filled by a tooth lost in glorious combat, red hair like a gonfalon waving through the crevices of an old slouch hat.

Such is the childish portrait of the urchin who developed for Philip a species of hero-worship. Nor could one wonder at it. His day began at five in the morning with the cows, and ended with the same animals after the long ride from school was over; who, at an age when his kind in England are still babies and in tender charge of elders, was ploughing and doing the miscellaneous work of a farm with his father and George, his stolid senior. On Peter, then, Philip dawned suddenly, as a being from another sphere, exquisitely dressed in a real riding-suit, handsome and spotless, speaking musically a different language. Peter had to thrash a friend hitherto dear to him for daring to imitate, with thin, mincing voice, an observation Philip had made on his first day. The mingled dirt and blood with which he emerged from the fray was an excellent cement for a friendship that had no end, and knew no rebuffs.

For a week Peter made no attempt to take advantage of his knight-errantry. He simply stared at the bright new being, who ate delicacies whose very names were unknown, in a space his frigid shyness had made empty and void. Poor child! He had been taught that these boys and girls were of another kind—peasants—material for servants and workmen. How could the lonely, isolated mind divine the cruelty and ignorance that lay behind the injunctions he was expected to obey?

Philip's pony had immediately become a source of admiring curiosity to Peter. He felt its legs surreptitiously. The discovery of a splint tortured him. He glanced sideways at Philip, eating his lunch a few yards away. He knew a sure remedy for a splint. Should he



impart his knowledge? This pony was a magnet that daily drew Peter and the others to handle and admire. Peter, who had never bestrid anything but the third of a horse, had hitherto found his cause of pride in that very circumstance, rejoicing exceedingly over his four unfortunate brothers and sisters, who only had a quarter of a quadruped apiece. This is a common thing in the bush. There is one school, to which five small children, arranged like sardines, ride an old white nag, along the giddy edge of a mountain precipice. Well might these youngsters say—"a little learning is a dangerous thing."

Peter confided the splint remedy in a loud whisper. It was received in stony silence. It is doubtful if Philip knew what a splint was. But if the Lee boy expected to rebuff Peter into withdrawal, he knew not his man. When the "Nosey Parker kid," as he was soon called, mounted to ride home, he found the Wister family, whose way lay along the same track, awaiting him. Outriders, in the shape of the four assorted Wisters on old Dolly, moved off solemnly in front, while Peter and his co-riders closed the procession. In vain Philip tried to get away from this humiliating adulation. His pony, delighted at the presence of companions, and restrained by no such aristocratic feelings as its master, merely tossed its head at the tiny flicks of the whip, and settled down into a pace that accommodated itself to the long, lumbering strides of old Dolly. Meantime, four pairs of Wister eyes turned back in military precision to watch the red-faced Philip, while at the rear he became conscious of six additional Wister orbs boring into his back their message of homage and admiration. No word was spoken. The Wisters had inherited a splendid paternal gift of silence.

Wister, *père*, had a farm on the river. From him Peter received his doggedness. When other farmers complained of God and the tax-gatherer, Wister merely worked earlier and later.

Polly, his wife, looked like one of her children till you got a close view of her. Under five feet, every one of her inches was an inch of indomitable humor.

To make up for the taciturnity of the rest of the family, she talked incessantly. A river of conversation rushed eternally through the house, fed by tiny tributary streams that hardly counted. Polly was its source. Her conversation continued even when she left the room and had occasion to go to the dairy or cow-house, many yards distant from the source of the stream. Her light cheerful tones could be heard, though distance rendered the precise words indistinguishable. On her return, she finished her remarks, oblivious of the yawning gap that lay between—"so I think that's the last we'll hear from her," she might cheerfully conclude, with a bright smile, leaving to her hearers' imagination the important details that conditioned the anticipated silence of "her." It may be that this undue loquacity had stunned her offspring into silence.

On Philip Peter's persistent adoration had at last an effect. Nothing human could have resisted it; certainly not Philip Lee's friendless heart, craving for something or someone on whom he could pour out all the thoughts and desires that childhood engenders.

He was wonderfully quick at school. Like a flash the meaning of a thing would jump to his mind, while the others would still be groping. Peter, one of the slow ones, admired this tremendously, and presently Philip, who loved to display himself, was helping the duller boy with explanations, couched in the language of careless pity. But what Peter once understood he never forgot. His mind was a bulldog that gripped tenaciously. Luckily he had a friend who was planning to use the qualities he was displaying in a sphere larger than a farmyard.

Payne, who had made acquaintance with each succeeding Wister at birth, took an immense interest in Peter. In his sureness, his unemotional nature, his reliability, he saw the makings of something unusual. With this in his mind, he asked Wister one day what he was thinking of doing with the boy.

"Well, I dunno", Doctor. Y'see, it's like this, There ain't enough land fer 'em 'all, an' I don't s'pose I'll

ever have enough money to set 'em all up on their own places. That George knows as much as me 'bout horses an' sheep. So does Petey, fer that matter. Likely they'll git a selection somewheres up in the Mallee—wonderful country up there. Wheat! Don't talk to me 'bout it. There's wheat up there 'ud make your mouth water."

Said the doctor: "Well, Jim, I think that kid's cut out for something better than Mallee farming. Have you ever noticed his marvelous power of observation? His eye's a magnifier, I believe."

"Yes. He's mighty good. He can tell the number in a mob of a coupla thousand sheep to a dozen or so. But there's nothin' in that. Plenty kids can do it. Can meself."

"I'm going to try and push him along, Jim. Here's the young beggar now. By Jove, that horse of yours won't be able to pack those kids much longer. They're growing like gum-trees."

Peter and George came up, prepared for milking.

"Come here, Pete," called Payne, and the boy walked over with a grin of pleasure.

"Just been talking about you. Ever thought what you'd like to be when you grow up?"

The grin became wider.

"Aw, go on, doctor. Ain't I gotta stop here an' help with the place?"

"Not necessarily. There'll be plenty to help with the place, won't there, Jim?" He appealed to the father, busy mending some sacks.

"Oh, I reckon one won't make much difference," Jim answered, not looking up.

"There you are. How'd you like to be a doctor, like me?"

"No fear," Peter smiled; "I ain't clever."

"Neither am I, old chap; but don't let on," confided the doctor. "How about a lawyer, then?"

Peter, with visions of the irritable practitioner whose appearance on a farm was usually a forerunner of woe, was violently opposed to this walk in life.

"Aw, rats, doctor. Everyone 'ud hate me," he said. After trying several other suggestions, Payne gave up. This was the first time Peter had ever had occasion to think of himself out of relation to the farm.

"Like school?" was the next question.

"You bet. I can do fractions. Phil showed me how."

"So Phil is a pal of yours, eh?"

"My word! He's goin' to be a great man. He says he is. You sh'd hear his stories—things that happened to him. He has stacks of adventures, jest like fellers in books. He's goin' to let me have a book about two young fellers like him and I. We're goin' whacks in it. He says we can."

"Good business. So he tells stories, eh?"

"My word! You sh'd hear 'im. Excitin'! No name for it."

The doctor smiled. He knew Philip's trick of dramatizing perfectly ordinary situations so that they became adventures. It was the boy's refuge from the drab monotony of his empty days. His mother had the same habit of mind. She dramatized herself in all sorts of ways. It was the source of most of her passing enthusiasms. She saw herself doing certain things, with admiring audiences surveying her, and she straightway began to enthuse, and to stage her fancies. It was thus she had become in early days Lady Bountiful.

It was this objectivity Payne recognized in Philip's passion for stories with himself as hero, the foundation of commonplace fact, and the superstructure of airy fancy.

"He'll be off to school one of these days, Peter. Wouldn't you like to go as well?"

"Me! What school? I go to school now," said the boy uncomprehendingly.

"I mean to a big school in Melbourne or Sydney."

"A public school?" asked Peter.

"Well, yes. They call them public schools, but they're not the sort the Government run. Have you ever heard of Eton or Harrow?" Payne was inclined to smile at the incongruity of the idea of such aristocratic institu-

tions, and the funny little Australian urchin, seated on the top rail of the cow-paddock, looking down on him with interested blue eyes, above a thick powdering of golden freckles.

"Yes," Peter answered surprisingly, "Phil told me. The kids all wear bell-toppers—I seen a picture of 'em in a book he's got—silly little blighters they looked, too."

"That's the place. Well, we've got great schools like that in Australia, only we don't let 'em wear toppers. How'd you like to go and live in one of them, near a big river, where you could row? You'd also learn all sorts of things you'd like to know, and of course there'd be cricket and football——"

"Golly!" Peter breathed, his face red with the thought of such a place.

"Here, doctor," interposed Wister, "don't put them ideas into the kid's head. D'ye think I kin afford that sort o' thing?" Without further words, he fell to his task again.

"If he's the kid I take him for, he'll afford it himself, Jim. Put an idea in this chap's mind, and make him see it's worth while, and he'll follow it up."

"He can't go follerin' that idea up, 'cos it costs too much money," Wister declared. "And if he don't get to milkin' them cows in two twos, I'm goin' to foller him up. Him an' his Etons!"

"He's got a head on him, Jim——" Payne began to interpose.

"An' he'll soon discover he's got a tail on 'im, as well, if he don't git to work," Jim remarked conversationally, without a trace of anger, but with a swift grim look at Peter.

The boy grinned understandingly at Payne and climbed down from his perch.

"Come on, Pete, you milk and I'll talk," the doctor suggested.

He did talk, and for the first time Peter heard that the Government granted splendid scholarships for competition among the pupils of the primary schools. The

poorest child in the country need never let his brains rust for want of a chance.

The idea was planted. Peter had before his dazzled eyes the winning of one of these coveted scholarships. Dr. Payne, an hour later, left a boy who was milking his tenth cow in a deep abstraction, in which Strawberry became a figure of the world. The world for Peter Wister was not an oyster, but a cow, from which the clever fingers of a college boy were passing the white streams of success and affluence.

And, by one of those coincidences which are so common, almost at the very time the doctor was discoursing of the wonders of Australian public schools, John Lee was delightedly reading for the sixth time a letter from the Head of Eton, intimating that after the ensuing summer holidays a place would be made for his son.

"Since I made such a failure with the wool this season, there's little chance for us to go back to our proper position," Lee said to his wife, "but at any rate I can spend enough to let the boy take his place among gentlemen."

Cicely essayed a protest.

"But they say the schools here are quite good, John. The Melbourne Grammar School——"

"You've been talking to Payne. 'Pon my soul, no one would ever think that fellow was an Englishman, the way he cries up these tin-pot institutions out here. Doesn't it stand to reason that England, with its hundreds of years of civilization, can do things better than a place that fifty years ago was alive with naked savages?"

"But Dr. Payne is an educated man—a Harrow man——," she began, once more.

"Payne has ratted on his country and his kind," Lee snapped. "The man is convicted out of his own mouth. He told me he had come out with English ideas—'crusted with them' was the term he used—but that before he was two years in the country he had decided to be a complete Australian, because—could there be a more sordid reason for forswearing one's native land?—

he said that a country that was giving him his living deserved to have his life, without any reservation. Absolute rot! Phil is an English boy, and, by the Lord, Cicely! an English boy he's to remain."

"But he'll have to earn his living in Australia," argued Mrs. Lee. "It will be a handicap to come back, with all his friends in England, and begin life afresh here. Whereas, if he went to school here——"

"Don't I keep telling you there are no schools here! Do you call those beastly shops, where every Giles and Hodge can send his child if he happens to have the money, schools? They may turn out an occasional fellow as a teacher or a professional man—but a gentleman, never. And that's precisely what you'd expect from a country where a man may work for you to-day, and to-morrow may be patronizing you because of a lucky throw, which has given him ready money. I put down Phil's name for Eton when he was a tiny chap. What a fool I would be to fling away the chance now it has come!

"Besides," Lee went on, taking advantage of his wife's silence to cover the whole ground, "his people may do something for him, if they see him——"

"But surely that would be an insult on their part to offer to do anything. I would never accept a farthing from that woman."

"By God, Cicely, they owe it to me. The old man swindled us—just rooked us like any Jew in the city. Surely that woman and her boy ought to do the decent thing by Phil."

Mrs. Lee stood up and faced her husband. "Sometimes I wonder if Phil will ever be a gentleman, John," she said.

"And in the name of Heaven, why not?" he demanded.

"Because his father is such a cad," she replied, icily, and, with a heart on fire, natural for the first time in years, she left the room.

## CHAPTER IV.

*"If I have taken the common clay  
And wrought it cunningly  
In the shape of a God that was digged a clod,  
The greater honor to me."*

—THE LIGHT THAT FAILED

WITH the unnecessary secrecy parents often assume as part of their Olympian equipment as high gods, Philip was not told of his impending departure. As six months were to elapse before he would leave, it is possible that the object of this silence was not to unsettle his mind during what remained of his school life in Australia.

After her sudden outburst on the evening the letter from Eton arrived, Mrs. Lee had given no token of protest, still less of rebellion. She had long known the weak, obstinate nature of the man she had married, and realized the futility of words in combating his desires. Since there was none of her own kind to give her the relief of sympathy, she withdrew into herself and sought surcease in changing mental excitements.

Meantime things went on much as before for Philip.

Phil heard Payne's plans for Peter with lordly disdain, and, as master, was inclined to resent not being consulted. With the brutality of childhood, he laughed.

"You win a scholarship!" he scoffed. "You're a mutton-head. You could never win one in a month of Sundays."

"I could, too," retorted Peter. "Dr. Payne says I could. Anyway, I'm jolly well going to. If you're so clever, why don't you try for one yourself?"

"Pooh! it's a kid's game," he said.



"If you won one, we could go to school together," Peter suggested. "Come on, Phil, have a shot at it. We can work together."

Phil thought a moment. Then a wild, overwhelming desire to astonish these people and come out on top flamed in his heart. A despairing after-thought quenched it. What would his father say? He was sure to forbid it. Then he took a resolution. Without a word to Peter, he rose and marched into the empty schoolroom, where the teacher, Miss Johnson, was having her lunch.

"Please, Miss Johnson, could I work with Peter for a scholarship?" he asked.

"Certainly, Philip."

"I mean—without—without my having to do any extra work at home?" he supplemented.

"I—I suppose you could. You're very quick at picking up things. But—does your father want you to take the exam.?" She was doubtful.

"No—yes, he does. He'd be very pleased." The overmastering desire displaced strict accuracy. "But I want to surprise him—surprise them both. They'll be pleased if I win a scholarship. It's worth heaps of money, isn't it?"

"Not heaps, dear. But it will send you to a splendid school for four years, and will give you a chance at the University afterwards," she explained.

"I must do it—I simply must do it, Miss Johnson," he pleaded, his eyes bright with desire. "Won't you let it be a secret between us two—and Peter? Please—please."

"Why, of course, you funny, darling little chap." she said brightly, giving him the first victory he was to win over women with his persuasive charm. "I'll love to help you, and we'll keep it dark. Mum's the word," she finished, her eyes dancing with fun, her finger on her lip.

"Fair dinkum?" asked the English boy in faultless Australian.

"Square dinkum," replied the ally.

Peter was delighted, when Phil stepped outside and gave a yell. But he looked doubtful.

"What about Eton?" he demanded.

"Oh, blow Eton. Father's always talking about it, but nothing ever happens. If we win scholarships, which college will we go to, Peter?"

"Mother says to Wesley, because her father was a Methodist," exclaimed Peter.

"Then I'll go to Wesley. My father's nothing," Philip told him. "There's nothing I ever wanted so badly as to win a schol. and go to Wesley with you."

Then a period of hard work started for them both.

The examinations were but a fortnight off, when Philip found that the high gods were dealing with his case, *ex parte*.

The seven hungry Wisters were seated round the table, at the head of which sat the parent male Wister. In the middle of the festive board a kerosene lamp smelt badly. Mrs. Wister hovered round making lightning flashes with a frying-pan to each plate in turn, depositing thereon a savory helping, which by this wise process was certain of being hot. As his or her plate was filled, each little Wister in turn darted on the food, with the quickness and greed of a cormorant. The flow of talk was bubbling on as usual.

"An' that Mrs. Lee she came to see me to-day. You was all away. I see her comin', an' there was me not so much as cleaned meself. She stood there in the doorway, all dressed up to the nines as if it was for a party—I give you a big helpin', Emmy, an' you'll have to wait; I an't et a bite meself yet—an' before I cud dust a chair for 'er——"

The narrative voice was suddenly changed for the *agitato* of domestic tension. A slight noise attracted her attention.

"There's that dratted cat in the parlor agin. I c'n hear it—there, I'll bet it's knocked over father's photer. I'll warm it up."

She vanished, but her voice was heard in measured

sentences, though verbally fogged by distance. In a minute she was back, and the narrative flowed on.

"So I upped an' said straight, I said, 'Me fine madam,' I said, 'if I had the servants some people has, me house would be cleaner'n a noo pin. But if it's too dirty to come inter, why don't some people stay at home?' I told 'er! 'Fine feathers,' I says——"

"Now, mother, ye know ye never said all that to Mrs. Lee—you, the best tempered woman in Riverina, and a lady besides," Jim said.

Mrs. Wister smiled widely.

"G'long, Jim, I did say it. I jest had to ease me feelin's. But I reckon she was near home by that time, so no harm's done. But I will say, Jim, of all th' interferin' janes I ever met—my goodness, if there ain't someone on the porch all the time. I knoo it wasn't the cat."

She flew to the door, and Philip walked in, cap in hand.

"I want to see Peter, Mrs. Wister," he said.

"If it ain't Philip, an' me just talkin' about his ma. Sit down, laddie, an' take a bite o' my pertater cakes. Best pertater cakes in the Riverina, though I says it as shouldn't."

"I've got to go to Eton, Peter," Philip burst out, as soon as he found an opening. "It's a shame, and the exam. in a few days."

Peter sensed the awful catastrophe better than the others. Anything that ever interfered with one of Philip's cherished plans was an awful catastrophe.

"P'raps if you went and won a schol. Nosey-Parker—I mean—p'raps Mr. Lee would let you off Eton," he suggested, while the embarrassing brood of silent Wisters stared with all their might.

"Let him off eatin'! But goodness gracious, child, you must eat," exclaimed Mrs. Wister. Somewhat pompously Peter explained, from the height of his greater knowledge.

"Bless my soul, what a name to give a college. An' I dessay not too much of it goin' on, in spite o' th'

grand name. I s'pose to make th' parents' minds easy," she concluded, brightly. "Always up to tricks."

"But we've got to go to Sidney for the exam. He wouldn't let me go," said the poor youngster. Besides, he thinks these colleges here are just tosh. He hates colonial things like poison. It's all up, Peter."

He looked heartbroken. His face was white, his hands shaking. Great dark circles made his eyes look unnaturally large and fever-bright. Emotion must have surged almost to insanity to bring him at night to the Wisters. Suddenly he gave a sniff.

"My gracious, the boy's cryin'!" exclaimed Mrs. Wister.

"I'm not," Philip denied, in a stifled voice. What rotten form of the women to direct public attention to the fact! Next moment the door slammed behind him, and in the stillness, which even Mrs. Wister suffered for a full minute, the flying hoofs of his pony beat out a tattoo on the hard clay road.

"It's a shame," Peter declared. "If I had a father like his, I'd—I'd—run away," he finished, furiously.

"Yes," gibed John, "like blazes you would. With a sore tail, too, if I heerd ye talk like that. Sit down at once, or I'll take me strap off. You let fathers manage their own kids, Mr. Smarty, an' I'll manage mine. And you git it out of your head that you kin put the whole world right."

The threat to "take his strap off" was known to each young Wister of them all as a solvent of rebellion. "The strap" was Jim Wister's buckler against family dissension and his own shield of decency. It had seldom been taken off, save in the legitimate process of undressing. It held his pants up, except when it was in use as a flagellant, and on those rare occasions his garments were upheld only by a strong sense of rectitude. In after life Peter often thought how the presence of mind to give a surreptitious tug would have brought an end to punishment.

Under the threat the Wister meal dragged to a conclusion, quiet even for them.

At the Park, Philip's restraint had given way. He had built up an entirely fantastic idea of the kudos the winning of a scholarship would give him. His childish hopes were built into the thing. With the clarity of the actual event, and with considerably more than its brilliancy, he had visualized himself as the winner of the first place. To be precluded from even trying for it was to him the wildest injustice—the most monstrous tyranny.

Mrs. Lee, knowing his nature, felt that he might be capable of the most alarming lengths, if his heart's desire were ruthlessly trampled on. She knew by now all the poor secret, which was to do such great things, and she was frightened, as she listened to her son's cries and tears, into sending for the hated Dr. Payne.

Payne felt his pulse, and took his temperature, after he had listened to his story.

"Over 100. Nothing to worry about in a child. Racing pulse, too. I say, Mrs. Lee, you'll have to go very steady with this infant." He eyed her curiously. "He's not quite a normal child. I should say he requires the utmost care and training a mother can give him, even if it meant a bit of a sacrifice. Is he going to Eton?"

"Mr. Lee is set on it," she told him.

"Huge blunder, apart from the essential stupidity of sending any Australian boy away from his own natural environment to get an education. That's none of my business, but with this child it is my business to warn you that he's not the type to send away at this age to any boarding-school."

"I agree with you, Doctor Payne; but tell me just why you say that," she begged.

"He has an excitable brain—and a very unusually clever one, I believe. It will require checking; but there's only one sort of check he will stand—the sort that comes from unbounded love. Some day, if he is not trained properly—and you are the only one to do

that—he will set his heart on something, perhaps not as easy to get as this scholarship, and if it is out of reach, things will happen. Keep him with you, Mrs. Lee, keep him with you.”

“But his father won’t hear of it. I know definitely he won’t allow Philip to be educated here,” she said.

“You love him, don’t you?” asked Payne, gently.

“Oh, doctor,” she said, gently.

“Then let me give you some advice—not professionally, but as a man. Fight his father for him. If you’re weak, he’ll ruin this little chap—ruin him beyond all question. Think it over, Mrs. Lee.”

“But——,” she began, a perplexed line running across her forehead.

“It’s up to you,” he cut in. “Now, about this exam. I won’t answer for the child if he’s not allowed to go up for it. It’s a harmless sport answering their idiotic questions. Take a run to Sydney with him, and let him sit for it.”

“But it will be so futile, Mr. Lee is so set against the whole system in the colonies——”

Payne laughed.

“Too crude, I suppose. I’d like Lee to meet the judges, the professional men, the engineers and what not who have gone through the mill here. My own shop at home was a decent place, but the standard at the Sydney and Melbourne Universities in medicine is so high that it was a toss-up whether I wouldn’t have to sit for a further exam. before they admitted me to practice. Mr. Lee’s insane on that point. Anyway, the boy must be allowed to go up for this exam. That’s the long and short of it, and I am master in a case of illness. Where’s Lee now?”

“He won’t see you, Doctor.” Payne laughed.

“Then I’ll see him. It is necessary. Where is he? In the dining-room? All right. You stay here. I’ll find him.”

Half an hour later Dr. Payne, thoroughly exasperated, but victorious, emerged from the dining-room. Philip was to go and present himself for examination.

So the boy won the battle. He won a scholarship, too, and on the representations of the doctor might have made good his full desires, and been entered at Wesley College. But, with the victory he won, his ambitions were satisfied. An indifference set in, after all the congratulations were over. The excitement of the voyage and the new strange school world he would enter in England possessed him, and Wesley College looked cheap. Peter had been successful, too, and was cock-a-hoop when he heard that the choice of a school was in his friend's hands.

"Good business. We can both go together," he cried.

"Oh, I'm not interested in Wesley now," the hero remarked. "I wanted to find out if I could win the schol. I don't want to bother about a tin-pot place like Wesley. Daresay father's right, and they're a rum lot."

He had just completed his eleventh year.

Dr. Payne looked at him reflectively when he met the boy and heard his raptures about Eton. He knew that Mrs. Lee, now Philip had recovered his health, thought him a fussy old woman, and had no intention of putting up the fight he had recommended.

"So you're mad on a thing till you get it, are you, my boy?" he thought. "H'm! I wonder what Life is going to do with you. Some day you'll be up against it—hard."

## CHAPTER V.

*"There we met with famous men  
Set in office o'er us;  
And they beat on us with rods—  
Faithfully with many rods—  
Daily beat on us with rods,  
For the love they bore us!"*

—A SCHOOL SONG

A PASSENGER in an express train can know little of the country through which he is whirled to his destination. Only a few salient features leap to his eye—a mountain there—here a river—over there a church folded in the hills.

It is, of course, possible for him, bored with the irritating jerkiness of a landscape seen in such flashes, hidden by an embankment or a tunnel just as it begins to appeal, to pull down the blinds, and, with a grim exasperation, settle himself in the corner with his eyes shut.

The reader may avail himself of a similar safeguard, as we hurry through to our main theme. The few scattered incidents of boyhood, which here serve to illustrate character in the making, may be regarded simply as sign-posts, which the knowing wayfarer may disregard.

The Peter Wister who, at twelve, timorously entered his name in the big, gray College, which squats, low and wide, at the further end of beautiful playing-fields, from behind which it peers out at the tide of traffic which flows along one of the loveliest boulevards in the world, was vastly different at first glance from the Peter who, at seventeen, was finishing his last year in the blaze of glory that encompasses the stroke of a crack Rowing Eight.



The red head was there, its exuberance slightly toned by the years; the cheery grin was still doing duty at the old stand—the blue eyes were as indomitable as ever; but this big, broad-shouldered fellow was not otherwise remindful of the bush boy who used to pay silent homage to Philip Lee and his pony.

It was the last practice before the big Inter-Schools Race, the classic event of the school year. Nowadays half a dozen famous schools take two days to compete for the coveted position as Head of the River, while fifty thousand people yell and cheer their favorite boat. In Peter's last year the excitement lacked nothing, though the numbers were not as great as are attracted to the event to-day.

On this May afternoon hundreds of small boys jostled and elbowed their way in a seething crowd round the Wesley boat house. The crew were coming out. Purple caps bobbed on the surface of the throng, eddied wildly a moment, perhaps to be seen no more. Caps were at that day and place spoils to the victor, to be exhibited as did Indians their scalps, as trophies well fought for.

"Good old Wesley!" The cry was flung to the winds in all cadences and varying degrees of shrillness. And yet this was not the event itself, only a rehearsal. One would have feared these infants were making serious overdrafts on the Bank of Anticipation.

"Here they come!" called out the favored few on the inner circle, and the mass surged forward irresistibly. The bright brown of the boat gleamed in the pale sunlight, and the prow began to cleave a way through the crowd. So might the Viking forbears of these lads have carried to the waves the latest warboat.

"There's Peter! Good old Peter! Sock it to 'em to-morrow. We won't do anything to Grammar, oh, no," they chanted, like a saga, the excess of negatives making an affirmation more appalling than mere statement could possibly have done. Cries as varied as the individuals burst from the boys. But everywhere on the crest of the wave of sound was the name—"Peter! Peter Wister!" Here was popularity. Here was fame, in-

toxicating—blazoned, purer in all probability than any that might come to him hereafter, free of all envy, purged of the bitterness that success attracts and littleness bestows.

As the oars dipped, there was another shout—a “ho!” for the best crew Wesley had put on the water for three years of victory. Then someone started the old school song, and a big volume of sound in the boyish trebles of the prep. school, and the ridiculous cracking voices of the oldsters, rolled across the gray water. The hurrying wayfarers on the old bridge above paused awhile and leaned over the parapet to watch the young crew sweep in splendid unison up the broad reach.

“We’ve got Grammar in a bag,” a boy chanted in his pride. Pandemonium broke loose. Derisive counter-cheering broke like a scattering storm from the crowd round the Grammar boat, then taking the water. Dark blue caps were waved tauntingly in the faces of Wesley boys.

“We’re home and dried,” crowed another infant, whose mother’s milk was scarce dry on his lips. The strained nerves of the boys found relief in loud laughter, accompanied with shrill shouts and whistles.

O’Dwyer, the English form-master, turned to his colleague. His name is forgotten for the moment. His business, however, was “stinks,” which some call chemistry. A downright person, O’Dwyer. His nickname was Mickey, and he loved it; as his parents had christened him Adolphus, his pleasure was natural. The master who knows not a nickname knows not popularity either.

“There’s trouble a-plenty a-brewing for to-morrow, O my friend,” he said, in the slightly strained style which much reading of literature induces. “These younglings are ripe for it. Hullo! there goes Scotch into the water. A joke lieth concealed there, friend. The water generally goes into the Scotch.”

“Not into the Scotch I know,” quoth the unnamed person who dealt in “stinks.”

"An excellent jest, and neatly taken up. To resume, they look a likely lot."

A rushing river of cardinal, the caps of the Scotch College ran in a flood from their boathouse to the riverbank, and soon the crew, in neat white sweaters, bordered with cardinal, went swinging up to the starting point.

"Young Wister's our trump-card," continued Mickey. "Wonder all this adulation doesn't turn their heads. Can't be good for 'em. Why, damn it, who can be a ruddy little hero at sixteen, and not suffer for it?"

"Oh, it's a good moral training," the other said, easily. "It'll take a lot of success to spoil a kid that's been in a crack school crew. He's had the world and the fulness thereof already—there goes Grammar! H'm! splash too much. And I ask you—look at Seven."

Then according to their natures, masters chatting on their peculiar problems—boys offering fabulous odds which they could never pay—"I'll bet you a million we'll win—a million to a gooseberry, come on"—the crowd settled down to watch the style in which its own particular crew would finish. Some had watches out—fortunate he who possessed a stopwatch; his popularity was assured—while others, impatient of dull waiting, streamed along the towpath on foot or a-wheel to watch the boats at the turn.

Presently Oxtan, the famous Wesley coach, unbribable from his ancient allegiance, came riding his disreputable bicycle, megaphone strapped round his head, his face turned to the river, confident that no boy, howsoever excited, would dare to get in the way of the sacred vehicle. A stream of vituperation issued from the megaphone and carried slanders clear across the river.

In ominous silence the Wesley crowd watched their boat come in. Grammar boys shouted coarse gibes. Something was wrong. This uneven, splashing crew was never the one that went off in such dashing style. Oxtan, megaphone in hand, leaned his bicycle against a tree and hurled schoolboys out of his path as he

hurried down to the landing to which the crew had drawn in.

"What the devil's wrong with you, Wister?" he blazed. "Bucketing like an old woman, you were. Didn't you hear me yelling to get your hands away? I'd sooner have the cox in your seat, if that's your idea of rowing. Think you're taking a party of old ladies for a river picnic?"

No one laughed at the pleasantry. Oxton's face did not invite the tribute. Peter's was ghastly.

"Sorry sir. Dunno what's come over me. I feel all in." His hand pressed his side, and he winced even as he spoke.

Curious, jostling boys from the three schools pushed inquisitive noses forward, burrowing like moles for passage. The word went round, after the crew disappeared to their dressing-room.

"Wister's cracked up. The great Peter's bad. Oxton won't let him row to-morrow."

An immense excitement took possession of the crowd. Of all mobs, your schoolboy mob is the quickest to feel and spread emotion. Wesley was done. Wesley without Peter was absolutely done. That was the burden, with variations on the same theme. Suddenly the crowd, which in complete silence had watched the lifting and housing of the boat, carried between their silent ranks like a corpse, stampeded and broke. Cardinal and dark blue melted from this purple mob, on whom the anger of the gods had fallen. Their own crews were signalled. One infant in the stricken ranks flung a gibe at a departing Grammar boy, a close pal in private life.

"Yah!" he yelled. "I'll bet you're glad he's out of it."

"Go and chase yourself," retorted the other, glancing to see if time would permit of the luxury of a reply. There was just sufficient to point a dart. "We could give you the lickin' of your lives with Wister in the boat. Without him our stroke would take your lot on in a leaky dinghy, an' then he'd have time for

lunch. We'll be back at school dinner by the time Wesley gets in to-morrow." With his five fingers elegantly spread, he touched his nose and departed for his own place.

Oxton left Peter to dress, without worrying him further. The rest of the crew were quiet, exchanging miserable looks with one another, with a swift, occasional glance at Peter, fumbling at buttons, with trembling fingers.

Into the changing room strode the Head, compelling and masterful.

"What's the trouble, Wister?" he asked, his voice booming in the quiet room. "Buck up and get your clothes on. I've got a cab outside."

"Dunno what happened, sir," said Peter. "I've had a bad head all day. Just as we were half-way back I felt bad—got a terrible pain here"—he placed his hand on his left side—"lost all my steam. D'ye think—does Mr. Oxton think he can't trust me to row to-morrow, sir?" Poor Peter hardly dared put the question, so fearful was he of the answer.

"H'm! We'll see. Randall—Dr. Randall, of Queen's—is dining with me. I'll get him to run the rule over you. You've probably been overdoing it in training. Ready? Right—here, give me your arm. You look pretty groggy. Now we're right."

Inspiring, great-hearted, understanding John Harmer! When you depart hence, will there be in those Elysian Fields where haply you will wander, boys with troubles, with perplexities, with dark secrets they may tell only to a sympathetic ear? If there are none, then will your occupation be gone indeed, and, despite your claims to happiness, misery will claim you, John Harmer; unless, perchance it be given unto you to stand at the shoulder of your successor, taking a silent part in the governance of the school you loved and created.

"It's the race I'm thinking of, sir," said Peter, in response to an inquiry in the cab.

"Never mind the race. There'll be plenty more races, Peter. We've won for three years running. Just as

well to let the other fellow have a look-in—makes better sport in the long run. Now don't jabber. We'll soon be home."

Randall's verdict was soon given.

"Slight strain. Out of the question to row to-morrow. Taking a big risk of making a small trouble a bigger one." Randall, medical tutor at Queen's, giving up to badly paid University teaching talents with which he might have made a fortune, commanded respect when he diagnosed.

"Oxton will waylay and kill you for that decision," Harmer told him. He thought it was exceedingly bad for boys to have unbroken victory, and, though his pride as Head would be gratified by a win, his philosophy would be equal to the strain of defeat.

"It's the death-warrant of Oxton's hopes. Crack strokes are not the creation of a day, you know."

"Crook hearts may be," quoth the doctor. "I'm not sure that tremendous strains like these, coming on top of hard training, are not bad for schoolboys."

"Go to, you old timorous female," retorted the Head, "go to. And in the strongest men of this generation find the doughty crews of our public schools of yesterday."

"H'm! H'm!" doubted the doctor. "That's a generalization sir, and as a scientist I hate a generalization as I do a lie, and for the same reason. Anyway, Wister must stay out of the game for a while."

"It'll break his heart, Randall—oh, spare me the banality that trembles on your lips, my dear man. I want you to interest yourself in this boy. Peter is going to be rather a big sort of chap. He's going up to Queen's next year. Keep an eye on him. The Master will, I know, and with you and the Master I've no fears for the lad."

"What's his line?" Randall asked.

"He has none. He's not brilliant; in fact, he's one of the slowest chaps in my Post Matric. form, but he always gets there, generally with a nose in front of the rest, too. No dazzle—but grit, pure grit."

Peter took his exclusion hardly, but with his accustomed silence. With the dawn he was up to see what sort of a day it was going to be. The wind makes a big difference to a boat, according to the station it draws. The sharp frost promised a fine autumn day. At the usual time he answered the dressing gong. He felt much as usual, but then, so he had before his disgraceful exhibition the previous day. A few minutes at the punching ball and a cold bath toned him up. Idiotic business in was, forbidding him to row!

"What absolutely rotten luck, Peter!" One of his form-mates approached him. "We're goosed. That swine Mason's broken training time after time."

"What!" Peter was amazed. In the high code of schoolboy honor to break training was the ultimate disloyalty.

"Fact. He was sick at not being put in the boat instead of Anson. That fellow Jacobs is a chum of Mason, and I heard him sniggering with some of his choice friends over the way Mason had done Oxton in the eye. He thought it was a huge joke."

"What a rotter! But p'raps that was some time ago, Clough. It mightn't make such a difference to the race. He's been down to the river and out in the boat a lot lately."

"He's never had a really hard try-out," argued Clough, "and only last week he was smoking cigarettes and eating muck in the city. Jacobs can tell you that. He'll never last the distance," the boy finished, disgustedly. "Oh, Peter, why the devil didn't you crack to-morrow, if you had to do it?"

Peter was thinking.

"Look here, Harry," he said at last, "I'm feeling fit as a fiddle to-day. Dr. Randall says my heart is a bit strained, but it's long odds it will last out this race. I didn't crack up before yesterday; I was probably a bit off color, anyway. See what I mean? Anyway, even if I'm a little bit gee-wobbly, I'll do better than that beast Mason. Harry, I'm going to get back into that boat."

Clough looked at him, without any words to express his feelings.

"But—but, how can you?" he asked at length. "Gid. would spot you at once and haul you out. He doesn't agree that winning a race is as important as keeping your health. "Gid.," a short form of Gideon, the Head's hated middle name, was naturally the one these young barbarians elected to call him.

"Well, it's lucky we know it's far more important," said Peter, "and I'm jolly well going to do it."

"But it's impossible," argued Clough. "Mason's name is down for the crew. How'll you get into the boat without Oxtan spotting you and rooting you out? He'll never go against Gid.'s orders. Then there's Mason himself. He's wild with delight at getting into the boat. It's no go, Peter."

"Oh, rot. Everything's a go if you jolly well make up your mind to it. Harry, do you want to see me in that crew?"

"Sooner than anything in the world, Peter. We'll be licked for certain if you're not. But you'll——" Clough was beginning further argument, but Peter interrupted.

"Then you'll have to help me. First of all nip on your good old bike after brekker and get my rowing togs from my locker in the shed."

"But how——?" Clough could not see the drift of Peter's mind.

"Go on, and don't argue. There's the bell. I'd go myself, but I might be spotted. I'll tell you the rest afterwards."

"Righto," Clough agreed. "I'll sneak 'em up to your room."

"No, bring 'em into the 'gym,'" directed Peter. "And not a single word to a soul," he warned, "not even to my very best pals."

The school was weighed down by disappointment. Mason, the first emergency man, was one of those overbearing, coarse-minded young blackguards which every school possesses to keep it humble—boys who are



cordially detested by all except fellows of their own kidney. His inclusion in the crew was an unpopular move, though on occasion he pulled a good oar. Oxton, with the wisdom of long experience, knew that where dissension existed in a team efficiency suffered. Mason had once been a member of the crew, but the happy family had been so set by the ears that the coach preferred to put in his place a boy who was not so good an oarsman, but an infinitely better team-worker.

After morning-school, which was dismissed an hour earlier than usual, Peter determined to open his game. He knew the boy he had to deal with. Mason was talking with two cronies.

"I want a word with you, Mason," Peter said, curtly.

"What do you want?" the other boy asked, none too civilly.

"About the race—I want to give you a few pointers."

Mason ungraciously joined him, and Peter led the way over the deserted cricket-field, far enough away for neither voice nor expression to distinguish them to curious eyes. Peter opened the engagement by firing a shot over the enemy's bows. It brought him up all standing.

"I can get you expelled," he said. His tones were full of the contempt a schoolboy dreads in his fellows.

"What for?" demanded Mason, truculently, but with an uneasy look in his eyes. He was visibly shaken by the sudden attack.

"Too numerous to mention," Peter assured him, "but breaking bounds to smoke and drink in the city are two of the things. Besides, breaking training is punished by expulsion from all sports," he reminded him.

"Prove it," retorted Mason, defiantly.

"Jacobs will prove it," Peter replied swiftly. "You know there's many a score up against you, Mason," he pursued his advantage. "Gid. would be only too glad to get something definite to go on. 'There are

certain fellows of the baser sort who are a scandal and a menance in our midst," he quoted glibly, with the ponderous voice of Harmer. "That means you. He would like to run you out, wouldn't he?"

"Oh, you go to——"

"*Wouldn't* he?" Peter cut across the profanity.

"Well, s'pose he would. He's got to have something to go on, hasn't he?"

"Yes, and I could jolly well give him the something, too. Now, listen. I don't want you to row this afternoon."

"You—what the devil's the matter with you? I've got to row. Do you want me to throw away the race?"

"Don't be a fool," advised Peter. "You haven't got to row."

"Who'll take my place, if I back out? We wouldn't have an earthly with young Barnett in my seat. Have a bit of 'common.' You must be potty."

"Barnett won't be in your seat, Mason," Peter told him.

"He's next emergency. Who will, then?"

"I will."

"You—you're done. Gid. wouldn't let you row with a crook heart. Remember the letters to the papers when a Grammar chap fainted at the finish last year? What's all this rot about, Peter? You and I have always got on well enough."

"Look here, Mason, I'm all right. I know Gid. would put my pot on if he actually saw me in the boat. But he won't, till it's too late. Same with Oxtan. See?"

"No, I blooming well don't 'see.'"

"You're a dense ass, then. I'll get permission to go up in the umpire's boat for the start. You've got to rick your leg, or your arm, or something on the way up. It'll be easy for you to fake it. Screw up your face and wince every time you pull, and leave me to do the rest."

"Well, I'm damned—give up my place in the crew

## CHAPTER VI

*"Then welcome Fate's discourtesy,  
Whereby it shall appear,  
How in all time of our distress,  
And our deliverance too,  
The game is more than the player of the game,  
And the ship is more than the crew."*

—A SONG IN STORM

ON the river, that afternoon, excitement ran through the crowd, like a bush-fire. The papers had canvassed the possibilities; Peter's mishap had been noted, the oracles declaring against Wesley's chances under the altered conditions.

A slight mist draped the river bank. Heavy, dark clouds had gathered, and a few drops of rain had fallen. The low westering sun struggled to get through the thick cloud-bank.

Peter, his rowing togs on under his suit, waited on the river-bank till the umpire's launch should nose in to take him and a few guests aboard. A sullen nod from Mason had been sufficient assurance to him that plans still held. The unemotional Peter felt an unaccustomed surge of excitement as he looked at the gathering crowds and noted the mingling blue, purple and cardinal of the tense infantry to whom this was the red-letter-day of the school year.

A knot of older Grammar boys, with gold prefects' badges, stood near the landing-stage. Something in the uplifted chin of one of them struck sharply a chord of memory in Peter's mind. If Philip Lee were not at Eton—— The boy turned, as though in answer to a summons from Peter, who saw that it was Philip. In two strides he had crossed the ground to him.

"Phil!" he called. Philip turned round again in some surprise. A blank look greeted Peter, changing to a look of swift recognition, of extreme pleasure.

"Why, if it isn't Peter Wister!" he exclaimed. "Of course I knew you would be here, but I wasn't thinking of it just then. What putrid luck you hurt yourself! They say it's left your chaps without a chance."

A voice of cultured timbre! A self-possession infinitely sure! A manner that accompanied a smile which was almost a decoration to Peter. With a rush all the old homage came back. He was not the popular hero of Wesley; he was once more a shabby urchin bestriding a worn old hack, with two children behind him. Philip maintained through his life the power of creating the illusion that for him only his companion of the moment existed. An exquisite tact, bland and warm, informed all his actions, except where his own vital comfort was in question.

Peter's face wore a look of inordinate pleasure.

"You old rotter, never to have written me or let know you were here," he cried, wringing Philip's hand enthusiastically. "When did you leave Eton?"

"You knew the mater had died, I suppose?" Philip asked, his face sobering.

"Of course. Didn't I write to you? My mother told me all about it. I'm awfully sorry, Phil."

"Oh, that's all right," Philip answered, with that embarrassment under condolence the Englishman always feels. "Hard lines, of course. He didn't come too well out of things—speculations, you know. The mater's living down here. Of course I left Eton at once. I've been here only a week or so; didn't want to come back to school, but she insisted on a last year. There's not too much cash, you know, Peter."

"Oh, you'll make plenty, Phil. But why not our shop? It's easily the best of the lot," Peter asked.

"Oh, well, I'd like to have made it Wesley, just because you're were there, but the mater knew some of the people whose kids went to Grammar. It's—well—no offense, Peter, old chap; but Wesley's—not quite—

you know what I mean—a bit rough, and all that sort of thing, don't you know?"

Phil's whimsical, apologetic smile, deprecating any offense, effectually robbed his words of sting. Peter laughed aloud.

"'Course I know. We have a few rough chaps—like me, for example; but——"

"My dear old man, you know I didn't mean that. You're the best fellow in the world, and my own particular pal. What a snobbish rotter you must think me," Philip broke in, warmly.

"I'm not offended," said Peter, with a comfortable sense of admiration for the generous nature of the other boy. "We have a whale of a time, and Gid. Harmer's the whitest sport you could meet. Wesley'll do me. But what's the good of gassing about our schools? There's heaps I want to ask you."

"Me too. But it'll wait. You're going to get it in the neck to-day, the knowing ones tell me. Don't expect me to yell for Wesley just because my pal used to belong to their rotten crew," smiled Phil. "You're a regular hero, apparently. Never bothered much about rowing myself. Cricket's my game."

Subtly his voice conveyed a faint disparagement of all games except cricket.

"Cricket's all right," Peter agreed. "How ripping if I'm playing against you, Phil, when the season comes round—oh, I forgot. I won't be here. I'm going to the University next year. By Jingo! how I'll hate leaving the old school."

"The University! Good Heavens! I forgot they had one," Phil laughed. "What a rum little place it must be. How many students have they? Fifty?"

"Oh, you're very superior," Peter smiled back. "We're not Oxford, but we're not too bad, for all that, and we'll give any of your old English Universities a go any time they like. One thing's certain, I'm dashed lucky to be able to get there. Dad isn't doing too badly, but it wouldn't run to the 'Varsity. I was lucky to grab an entrance schol. to Queen's."

"Good for you, Peter. You're a trier. And what's 'Queens?' I'm not up in local knowledge."

"You ass; it's a University College. Trinity and Ormond are the others. It's all kinds of pie to be in one. Most of our chaps go to Queen's. Your little superior lot go to Trinity—Scotch to Ormond. 'Scuse me, Phil, I've got to go. There's the umpire's boat, and I'm going in it to see the start. See you again."

"Rather, young Wister—sorry we've got to lick the stuffing out of you to-day."

With a backward laugh, Peter hopped on the launch, which went chug-chugging a hundred yards up the river, and then drifted near the bank. Soon the crews came out—Grammar first, pretty, clean-limbed, and lightly-built. Wesley followed, their purple sweaters making a bold splash of color on the dull water. Then came the Scotch eight, in brave cardinal.

"Give your eyes to be in that boat, eh, Wister?" one of the men said—he wore the medal of the Old Wesley Collegians. Peter warmed to him.

"You bet," he said, fervently.

The fussy little launch soon began to churn up the river, and hustled importantly forward towards the starting-point.

"What's up with Wesley?" a lady asked, as the launch rounded the bend and came in sight of the three crews.

"More trouble!" muttered Peter's new friend. "The devil's in it, I think."

The Wesley boat had pulled alongside a launch from which Charlie Oxtan was speaking. Mason's face was a mask of pain. He held his arm tenderly.

"Massage it for him, Anson." Oxtan called, impatiently. "Good Lord, what a silly fool!"

"I can't stand it, sir. It hurts too much. I can't move it without it hurting. I've strained a ligament, I think," Mason called out, making grimace do duty for want of pallor.

"Nothing for it but to take the boat out of the race," the coach said. "We'll be too late to get Barnett now."

I told him he needn't wait in the shed. Who could have foreseen this! And only three minutes from the start. By Caesar! I'd ship a monkey rather than turn it up like this. That crowd'll say we funk'd it without Peter Wister."

Urquhart, the umpire, called out:

"Stations, please! What's wrong there, Oxton?"

"Mason's strained a ligament, Mr. Urquhart. Afraid we'll have to stand out."

"'Fraid there's nothing for it, Oxton. Bad luck, sir. Awf'ly sorry. No other man handy, I suppose? I could give you a few minutes' grace."

"No good, sir," called Oxton. "There's only Barnett, and he'd have to be found in that crowd, and then get into his toga."

"Too bad! Well, if you're sure—hullo, what's this?"

Peter, who had shed his clothes like lightning in the very face of scandalized guests, stood beside Urquhart in his rowing togs.

"I'm feeling right as rain, sir, and we must make a showing somehow. We can't pull out altogether."

"But they told me you had strained your heart, man——," began Urquhart, with a Scotchman's slowness in the uptake. Peter was in an agony.

"I'm quite all right," he insisted, almost dancing.

"Please tell Mr. Oxton I'll row." The Wesley boat was already under sad way down stream, and so had come nearer the launch. Oxton had been looking across the space of water at the white figure in the umpire's boat, unwilling to believe his eyes.

"Is that Wister?" he called out, incredulously.

"Yes, that's all right, Mr. Oxton," Peter answered for himself. "I'm coming over." The man at the tiller had gently nosed the launch in until it was touching the Wesley boat lightly, the port oars shipped, as the rowers saw the manoeuvre.

"Climb up, Mason," commanded Oxton. "Lend him a hand, Peter. Careful! it's the right arm. That's the ticket! Now then, Wister, I don't see how I can let you risk it."

"You've got to, sir; you must. I'm as well as ever I was. Don't let them say we funk'd it." It was dexterous pleading, for Oxton had the true sportsman's feeling that to stay in the game was worth a physical risk. For himself he would have taken it unhesitatingly.

"Change over Markby," muttered Peter, at the gunwale, to the boy who was in stroke's seat. The accompanying frown and wink were enough for Markby. Steadying the frail boat by gripping the gunwale of the launch, he made the exchange, appearing not to hear the undecided, "Wait a while, Markby," with which the driven Oxton sought to gain time to think. Peter instantly lowered himself gingerly into Markby's seat, and inserted his feet into the straps.

"Time's up," barked Urquhart, who had a reputation for punctuality to maintain. Oxton had perforce to obey the tempting little demon that whispered the comforting assurance that the decision had been taken out of his hands.

The other crews had watched the manœuvres of the Wesley crew with speculation as to what they portended. They drifted a few yards nearer, and their wonder changed to a spirited pleasure as they realized what had happened. The Grammar stroke, with an inspiration that did him credit, turned round to his crew, and, with an inviting side-glance at Scotch, called out:

"Three cheers for Wister, boys. He's going to risk it."

A mile down the river they wondered what the sudden burst of cheering meant.

To a good start the three crews got away. Peter had never felt in better fettle. Overhead it was gloomy; rain was not far off. At a rattling pace for schoolboy oars, a quick 41, the Grammar stroke got his boat off. At a slightly diminished tempo Scotch followed. Peter, distrusting himself somewhat, was inclined to nurse his crew. He did so till two yawning lengths separated him from Scotch, while Grammar was at least half a length in front again.

Peter's heart sang. He was stroking his boat again,



if it was for the last time. Even defeat mattered little. The success of his stratagem exhilarated him. Time enough to worry over its ethics after the race. He was back again, back again. The words sang themselves to the rhythm of the oars. He increased the time, feeling, as only an oarsman can, the reserve behind his crew.

The leaders had expended some of their steam. Grammar was thrashing a bit, but Scotch kept a beautiful, even stroke in smooth water.

Here was the bend coming. Now the pace ought to mend. Peter knew he could afford a rattling crew like Scotch no more than they had already. Simultaneously with the decision to speed came the fear that it was not in him. Or did the tiny stab of pain come first? He never knew, but the cox saw his face whiten and his lips tense themselves suddenly. Into Peter's eyes came for one brief moment the light of defeat. Little Edwards almost sobbed into his megaphone.

"He's cracking up again," he thought, with a shiver. Who can measure the tremendous significance of victory to these little men? It was like death to this twelve-year-old to finish without a gallant effort.

Peter's stroke grew uneven. He was losing his grip. Edwards yelled sharply, counting in frenzied rhythm, until Peter steadied, rallied by the little chap's voice. Once more the oars fell in unison.

Then Peter by sheer will-power drove from his mind that bitter conviction of defeat. He would win! He would win! Damn the pain! Damn the pain! The oars beat out this monody now. He could master the pain! How easy it would be to sink to the bottom of the boat and go to sleep. How delightful! How splendid! No longer to have to thrash the water with those hideously long, horribly heavy oars! The water was an enemy. You had to hit and hit, or it would be too much for you. His brain whirled wildly. They had rounded the bend. A swift look showed him that the relative positions were unchanged. He was amazed. He had been rowing an hour. His glance showed him something else, too. A huge gonfalon whereon the Wesley purple

and gold shone emblazoned waved in front, beckoning him on.

It was the sun, which had at last broken from its prison-house of purple cloud, and shot golden beams in splendid lateral glory across the horizon. Peter mastered the pain; mastered, too, the yeasty thoughts that surged in his brain, urging him to rest now, and take up the task when he felt better; to cease whipping the inexorable, never-ending water.

With suddenly cleared mind, he saw the job in hand to be done. Striking thirty-eight, he increased his speed, and the little cox laughed aloud, in his relief.

"We've got 'em, Peter; we've got 'em," he exulted, for the strip of water narrowed between Wesley and the two leaders, that were now fighting, canvas level, believing that their third opponent was out of the race.

Inch by inch the purple sweaters crept up. Their canvas was level with the rudder of Grammar. It passed it. Grammar, splashing badly, was done. Scotch was in better case, but tried with the too early spurt. Not a sign of pain felt Peter now; only a huge, exultant happiness that filled him, balloon-wise. They came into the level reach that led to the winning-post, the three boats abreast, fighting for passage. Then Wesley got its nose in front.

A roar from the crowd, continuous and deafening. A sudden diminuendo and a babel of incredulous exclamations and questions from the cognoscenti; then, as Peter was recognized beyond peradventure, a crashing crescendo of noise that must have outdone the wondrous shout of the ten thousand that brought the walls of Jericho toppling in level ruin.

"Peter! Peter! Peter Wister. It's P-e-e-ter!" wailed his school-fellows hysterically, and beat each other cruelly on shoulders and head.

"Wesley! Wesley! Wesley!" came in great gusts of sounds, sonorous as a bell, making ineffectual as whippers the counter-shouts of, "Grammar! Come away, Grammar! Scotch! Scotch!"

"Half a canvas," was the official verdict. Peter did

not hear it. The will to achieve had sufficed only for the achievement. He slumped forward over his oar, and quietly yielded to that lassitude he had earlier fought so valiantly.

He was soon right. But his rowing days were over. Never again would he know the sickening sense of failure or the exhilarating breath of victory, as his boat speeded down between two black lanes of cheering people. That was the sacrifice he made that his beloved school should not know the pangs of disgraceful defeat. Defeat she had known, and would know, but never that kind which would have followed such craven disloyalty as Mason's.

Said Micky O'Dwyer, the English master to his colleague who dealt in "stinks," after all the tumult and shouting had died away:

"I've found out one thing Wister possesses—a rather rare thing, too."

"Yes!" His friend's voice had an encouraging note.

"A sense of the picturesque—of drama. He has the faculty of wrenching from an incident the one thing that marks it off from the commonplace. That, my friend, is drama."

"If you say so," said the other, politely.

"I do say so. In his story of the race, dragged from him by force and threat, did you note one thing—the thing—the salient fact which o'ertopped all the rest of a flat narrative?"

"You're dying to tell me, so I won't guess," said the "stinks" man—a lovable person, you will perceive, a panderer to others' self-love.

"Well, it was that sudden, flaming glory of Wesley purple and gold, a most dramatic and picturesque description *in petto* of a commonplace sunset. A boy that can pluck the drama out of an episode should not be a doctor. Gid.—confound those boys and their ill-example—Harmer has been wondering what his line will be. A sort of fairy godfather of his is a doctor, and wishes the lad to follow in his footsteps, but if anyone asks you, Ames—so that was his name—what I think about it, tell 'em, my friend, I'm agin it."

"Do you think you've discovered a dramatist, Micky?" Ames asked, with a pitying smile.

"No—a journalist, heaven-born, heaven-sent; possibly a dramatic critic, but a dramatist! Lord, no. No imagination, but chock—observe me, my maker of stinks—*chock*-full of observation, with a nice sense of discrimination. Mark me. By George, it's seven, and I'm taking prep."

With flying gown the prophet fled.

## CHAPTER VII

*"And we all praise famous men,  
Ancients of the College;  
For they taught us common sense—  
Tried to teach us common sense—  
Truth and God's Own Common Sense,  
Which is more than knowledge!"*

—A SCHOOL SONG

WITH what gusto would Madame de Sevigné have sat down to write a "pen-portrait" of the Master of Queen's!

Incongruities spring to the mind, when one gazes for the first time at him. Could this man of joyful, jolly laughter, who saw life as a pageant, and was not content till he strode along in the procession, like an excited urchin at a circus parade, be a minister of a connection reputed as narrow? Ben Jonson in a Methodist net! Rabelais in a monastery! Shakespeare in an American School for Journalists!

The rigid Methodism that obtained forty years ago must have gasped, when its wide trawl, amongst its usual catch, gripped in its meshes this free, catholic spirit. He, too, must have eyed with a sort of shrinking dread the grim church members, under whose *aegis* he was to live. But it is characteristic of the man that he did not break away from the milieu in which the accident of birth had tossed him, willy-nilly. He remained, to see its asperities softened, its human sympathy broadened, its sphere of influence incalculably widened. The barbed wire that fenced his church when he joined it has long been cut and carried away.

When his leaders established a College at the University for training candidates for their ministry they could find no better man to superintend it than he.

For more than a quarter of a century he has worked to launch in life men no younger than himself.

A big, loose frame; a clean-shaven face, with no petty secrets to hide with hair; its notable feature is the large, mobile mouth of the actor or preacher, two professions that have much in common; lips adapted equally for smiles or tenderness; eyes that twinkle with fun, but which meanness may irritate into steely contempt; three chins, of which the original is square; a high, benignant forehead, crowned with a thick mat of brownish hair, of the color that grizzles slowly; an immense leonine head set on a columnar throat; a thick nose that flouts aristocratic aquilinity, flaunting only its common honesty. If he has a weakness—and the chin just hints a fault that the laughter-loving mouth confirms—it is the weakness of a man who so loves the sinner that he almost forgets the sin, the weakness of him who can forgive unto seventy times seven, who can be stern only to contumacy and cruelty.

Careless dress—a shabby old coat of one-time clerical gray, and tubular trousers that hang with a superfluous fold over thick, sensible boots, garments that announce to the world a scathing contempt of your niminy-piminy creases and your effete trouser-presses; far back on the head there perilously hangs a trencher, which cocks its eye at mankind with an impudence most unministerial, while challenging the rest of its brethren in battered antiquity, a very rake-hell of a trencher; sometimes a torn gown floats from his shoulders, oftener it breaks his own rules and is forgotten; but the old, foul pipe between the teeth is eternal. Rumor that will have it he sleeps with it may be disregarded. But he certainly parts with it last of all his daily necessities. To make an end, his body is over sixty, his heart just twenty-five. His vocation is Divinity, his delight Literature, his recreation Music. His is the free, lively spirit of the men who watched the dawn of those "spacious days of great Elizabeth." Their genius of ideal, their breadth of view, their pride of country reach forward over the centuries and pluck him back to their own day. Whenever he can

escape he flies to them. In their manner, and of their matter, he, too, writes.

So, in tenuous, feeble outline, is the Reverend Thomas Savile, Bachelor of Science, Master of Arts, sometime of Yorkshire. If there were a degree in the conduct of life, he would rank high in the class-lists.

John Harmer and the Master worked as a team. To Harmer came the raw material. On his slips, it was fashioned and hewn roughly, to take the water; he weighted the keel for balance, and caulked the seams. Then, unfinished, it came into Savile's hands. He fastened on the rudder, stepped the masts, hoisted the sails, and, last service of all, gave it a flag and sailing directions. Between these two many a clipper-built craft has been fitted out, and has successfully taken the seas. Failures there have been. Some have been posted as missing at a ghostly Lloyd's. The fault has lain in unsound timbers, or wilful disobedience to orders. The builders were not to blame.

It was under such a leader that both Philip and Peter came at the most critical period of life. Philip followed Peter, after a year's interval. He owed the gift of a University career to the generosity and kindness of the Master. Mrs. Lee had not the means to give him the chance. An ill-paid clerkship or a trade apprenticeship offered poor alternatives to the fine product of Eton. Both mother and son were in despair. So was Peter. In a pregnant moment he broke silence, and told the Master the whole story. Magically the ways were made straight. From a fund at his disposal the Master procured a bursary that enabled Philip to come to College for one year. His further progress depended on himself. If he obtained First-class Honors at the end of the year, the bursary would become a scholarship.

That incident was now three years old. The two boys shared the same study. Both were doing the law course. Their room gradually focussed all that was best in the College. It had a habit of filling up during the first two terms for talk and cocoa, about ten o'clock.

Oh, those college pow-wows! Questions which for

generations had agitated the minds and exercised the brains of leading statesmen came upon the carpet and were summarily settled out of hand. Utopias came into glorious mental being, needing only an entire change of heart and nature in the world to transform them into glowing reality. August University honors and ripe experience did not save grave and reverend seigniors from merciless judgment in this Court. Nice questions of College honor, of collegiate government, of good form came up before the junta and rulings were given, which, a little later, islanded in a few black lines on an immense ocean of white paper, went up on the Common-room Notice Board and passed into law.

The amazing discursiveness of it all! At ten o'clock the imaginary agenda paper would begin with sport. With no perceivable wrench it would flow evenly in the space of an hour over an infinity of subjects that included socialism, religion, a new tennis court, psychology, international relations, including a perfectly new theory for making wars impossible, intercollegiate spirit, death, rival brands of cocoa, a subject leading naturally to the abolition of war, the place of sex in the cosmos, and a good emolient after hard exercise.

Phil Lee was the college hero. A great joss, seated on a throne of crossed cricket-bats, holding in each upturned palm a leather ball, would be no bad symbol for the god of young Australia. It represents Phil at this period. If the average youth were offered by a walking delegate from the Infernal Regions—the origin of most of the tribe—the alternative of carrying out his bat for 120 in an important cricket-match, or an assurance of eternal salvation, with the figure 0 attached to his celestial robes as an index to his cricket capacities, not one in ten would ever pay the Devil the compliment of one meagre, little moment's hesitation.

That very feat had been accomplished by Phil in the previous term. He had grown accustomed to his arrival in Hall being signalized by the rattling of teaspoons on saucers, and the tattoo of feet on the floor. The harsh "That will do, gentlemen," from the tutor on duty at



the High Table was merely an added accolade, that drew attention to the compliment.

Peter delighted in this popularity of Philip's, burning incense before the joss. His own place in the college he valued, but seriously considered it the result of reflected glory. The congested state of the Lee-Wister study at ten o'clock was a tribute none tried to explain. It was the rendezvous of a choice collection of earnest young men.

Good Heavens! If only the magnificent earnestness of young men could by some mysterious alchemy be preserved for the use of middle-age! One-tenth of the altruism displayed in that study, had it possessed the keeping quality of good wine, for example, or the powers of an inoculated drug, might have turned every Australian politician into a statesman, every preacher into a pastor, every pedant into a teacher, or, to exaggerate slightly, every labor agitator into a human being. What an attractive vista of possibilities opens out before the dazzled vision! Alas! If youth could be a time of happiness only, unaccompanied by illusion! Or if illusions could be suddenly transformed into facts! Some day they will be. These dreams must come true. Why should young men be granted visions, only to be forever mocked? Ideals will not always wither in the frost of Life-as-it-is. Come! Better a disappointed Optimism than a cynically grinning Pessimism!

The usual crowd was gathered about the middle of Second Term. A babel of voices, as they settled down on anything that could afford their weight. Then—talk, talk—much that was good, plenty that was banal. Living on the heights in cold work. But how they pounced on anything fine!

O'Shea—little O'Shea is a professor now, worrying about the High Cost of Living—opened round eyes, shielded by thick innocent glasses, beaming with the light of enthusiasm.

"Listen to this, you chaps—shut up there, Charley—it's fine, *fine*. By god, this chap can write."

Then, in an execrable voice, he read from one of the

newer gods, who is by now an old god, almost *demodé*. O'Shea called him "a coming man."

Fierce argument ensued. A chance spark from a phrase lit a new train of thought, which burnt splutteringly a minute or two and then exploded a magazine of ideas, which fell to savage discussion. Arguments were always explosive somehow. The participants would almost snatch the words from each other's mouths, snapping up the conversational bone, before it had well dropped from the teeth of the last holder. Impossible to be calm about matters that meant so frightfully much to the world. Across the room, dense with tobacco smoke, eyes lit with a glare of enthusiasm would bore into the speaker's, penetrating, questing for truth.

John Weir, theological student, dour and shabby, earning a few extra shillings by taking Sunday pulpits in the country, generally came along with an annotated Bible in his pocket. Some of his notes would have scandalized the Faculty. He had a high, cachinnating laugh that bared gums and palate. It was a signal bugle he blew whenever he was going to break into a humorous story, for which he had a great preacher's gift. Then, the anecdote successfully launched, and attention focussed on him, his lugubriousness returned, and he would develop the theme he was engaged in presenting to the company. Now he pulled out his Bible, his face serious as a judge, while the laughter at his story was still rippling.

"What does this mean?" he roared. "If this means what it says," and he slapped the open Bible savagely, "we're all wrong. The whole of Methodism must go into the melting-pot. There's no middle course." He read the text out. The debate waxed keen as a meeting of the early Fathers.

"A man can't preach that. I'll have to leave the ministry. Methodism is doomed. It's founded on wrong assumptions."

His portentous, extravagant judgments sounded infinitely solemn to them all. The fire cracked loudly; they started. Weir made the imminent destruction of Metho-

dism sound very real and near. But a word misused, a wrong conclusion, a faulty premise diverted the argument. Le Mestre caught up Weir suddenly with a question.

"What is Evil?" he asked, in his queer, quietly gentle tones, his face long and earnest. A First-class in Philosophy made him the natural guardian of the truths it embodied.

"What is Evil? Jack Weir uses the word glibly in his confounded clerical way and fixes some damned conventional meaning to it, and blasts us with a conclusion." The expletory style of Le Mestre was comically at variance with his gentleness. "His whole argument is based on a false definition. Is there such a thing as Evil, anyway? Isn't it only undeveloped Good?"

Everyone tried hard to consider whether Evil after all was not just Good with its back turned.

"But you must use terms in their ordinary, everyday significance, Le Mestre," Weir retorted.

"Not when you're discussing a thing philosophically," Le Mestre informed him, with serene certainty. "You must always define your terms. Scientific nomenclature isn't ordinary nomenclature. Besides, you're guilty of a howling '*υοτερον ποτερον*—why the devil don't they teach you theologs logic?"

The argument went on, till a drawling, tired voice exclaimed with humorous effect:

"O-h, dry up, you chaps. We don't all do logic. Some of us ignorant blighters are only rotten Science men—we know nothing. How'd you like me to work out the perimeter of Venus? Weir knows nothing of logic and Le Mestre knows the same amount of theology. Hit a chap your own size."

Long, shambling, gangling Irwin looked mild boredom. No one, to look at him, would have suspected that the almost ludicrous physiognomy concealed a wonderful brain, that he was destined to become in a few years one of the leading astronomers in the world. Le Mestre and Weir, red with strenuous argument, joined in the laugh-

ter that effectually broke up the pursuit of the meta-physical hare. Soon the air throbbed with a new subject.

"Jolly decent of White to let that stroke go," Phil remarked, coming into the room with a steaming jug of cocoa, brewed over the gas-ring common to the staircase.

"Can't see that," Ferres, a medical student, broke in. Phil looked at him in surprise.

"Didn't think there'd be two opinions in a case like that," he said.

The incident he referred to is worth relating, focussing as it did in itself all that was best in College life.

The intercollegiate tennis matches were just over. Trinity and Queen's had met in the last round. Rivalry, as it always is in these contests, was keen, being a legacy from the schools where the contestants have generally met each other before.

Queen's and Trinity were well matched. Towards the end, a hard-fought match left the teams in the interesting position of equal games, and the last set was nearing its conclusion. Deuce was called. Queen's won the next stroke. Trinity, after a splendid rally, evened the score. Twenty times the fluctuating tide of play delayed the issue of the game, as each side won alternate points. It soon became a fixed idea with the shouting crowd that victory would finally perch on the banners of the side that won this important game.

At this juncture the Queen's server sent in a swinging serve that just touched the line. The line umpire, caught napping, called "Fault!" A yell from the crowd on that side of the court gave evidence of a conflict of opinion. White, the Trinity striker, smiled and shook his head at the umpire.

"It was quite right," he said. But the umpire, wisely determined not to recall a judgment once given, stolidly repeated his verdict. The next serve happened to be a "fault," too, and the stroke went to Trinity. The next stroke would give them "game," and, as things were then going, almost certainly "set" and "rubber."

The crowd watched tensely. Not a sound could be heard as the balls were thrown back to the server, and

he prepared to send his first serve over. It came—an easy, natural lob, most meet for the drive that White was famous for. He did not even raise his racket. The ball flew harmlessly behind him, and the point went to Queen's. A roar of dismay—then a counter-roar of admiration greeted the sporting spirit that would not accept a wrong decision. Queen's won the set and rubber.

"A man's first duty is to his side," Ferres insisted. "All this nobility of conduct is all very well from the grandstand, but a man can't take the responsibility of deciding a point like that for himself, and sacrificing his college."

"I'd be sorry to think you meant that, old chap," Phil said, with a smile. "White did the finest thing I've seen in sport. I tell you I'm damned sorry we had to win the match. I'd have thrown away a stroke only it would have looked too much like imitation. Poetic justice should have seen that Trinity won."

His fine, flashing eyes, alight with generous enthusiasm, abashed Ferres.

"Well, I admire him, but I still think he was wrong," he said.

"What do you think, Peter?" Phil asked.

Peter, who had listened with attention to all the talk, without saying anything himself, looked up at his friend.

"I'd sooner be White to-night than the King of England," he said.

"Hear! Hear!" Phil applauded the sentiment. "All I can say is that I hope, when the opportunity comes, I'll have the moral courage to disappoint my friends in order to do the decent thing."

O'Shea quoted unctuously:

*"The game is more than the player of the game  
And the ship is more than the crew."*

"Oh, Lord, if Kipps is going to spout poetry, I'm off," said Ferres.

"Keep your seat, Martin," advised Le Metre. "There's no danger, if we keep our heads. He can't help it. He Kipples in his sleep."

A heavy knock at the outer door had sounded as O'Shea began his quotation.

"That ass Sawyer come to borrow more cocoa," remarked Phil, as a little silence fell. He gathered up a red cushion.

"Come in and be damned to you," he called, and threw, as the inner door opened.

"I'll be very cheerfully damned, if you only let me get in," said the Master, his roar of laughter easily leading the others.

"Abandon hope all ye who enter here," he recited, sepulchrally, and his ready laughter broke again.

"Sorry, Master, I thought it was somebody else," Phil apologized.

"You young devil, if I didn't believe that, I'd—I'd rusticate you. Who's got all the tobacco?"

Half a dozen pouches were held aloft.

"Here you are, Master," Ferres called, pitching his across.

"Oh, no, Martin, not that awful Boer stuff. I've tried that camel-dung, thank you. Once is enough for an old stager. Never again. Ugh!"

"If you'll use a smaller pipe, I'll give you some real tobacco," Le Mestre offered, with gentle irony. At the same time he threw a pouch which the Master caught dexterously, returning Ferres' with a laugh.

"Here, take this arm-chair, sir," invited O'Shea, getting up.

"No, no, Kipps; keep it, keep it. I'll squat on the table. I'm too young for padded ease."

He cleared a space and hitched himself into position. Soon his pipe drew freely and clouds of aromatic smoke issued from his lips.

"Ah!" he breathed. "Would you believe Conference wanted me to give up my pipe? They think it's immoral to enjoy anything so much as I do tobacco. Some of those chaps will head a movement for making heaven uncomfortable. It'll go against their consciences to be happy."

A roar of laughter and remonstrance arose.

"Fact! I told 'em I'd give it up as soon as I'd smoked the plug I was using. The missus is taking care of it for me, in case I use it by mistake." He roared with appreciation at the trick, which was probably apocryphal.

"You're a Jesuit, Master," Le Mestre accused him.

"Well the Jesuits know how to make this life comfortable," he retorted. "I'm not so sure about the next. Well, that's enough nonsense. You fellows do talk a lot of rot. How's the great Philip after the fine game he put up to-day?" He turned to Phil, with an affectionate smile, and cast a great arm about his shoulder.

"Not quite so bucked up as if we'd lost to Trinity, Master," was the reply.

"I wish it had been one of our fellows who had the chance of throwing away that stroke," agreed the Master. "It was the most successful failure Trinity's ever had. I've sent a note to the Warden."

"Good business," approved Phil, and the others chimed in.

"It was splendid of White," the Master repeated. "And did I hear the words of the great Kipling as I came to the door?"

"You certainly did, Master," O'Shea assured him. "He's like the Bible—got a text for all occasions."

"H'm! Methinks I note a subtle difference, O Kipps," the visitor said, whimsically smiling. "Any cocoa going? My wife's out at a concert, and the girls starve me. They think I'm getting fat."

While Phil hastened to borrow a cup and saucer, the talk ran brisker than ever. Youthful positiveness had, however, the grace to feel abashed in the presence of the man who knew so much that he had gauged the extent of his own ignorance, and was positive about nothing but the goodness of God. He perceived the inwardness of their minds; he loved their idealism; saw their visions; warned them gently of lions in the path. Yet never a word of goody-goodiness, not a whisper of professionalism marred the effect of his influence.

At eleven he shuffled off the table, and knocked the dottle from his pipe.

"By-by time, lads. Thanks for the cocoa, Phil. And I owe you a pipeful of the worst tobacco I ever smoked, Colin," he turned to Le Mestre.

"And I'll get it if you pay me back with that awful stuff you use, Master. Why don't you buy tobacco instead of getting it at an ironmonger's with a pound of nails?" retorted Le Mestre, with calm insolence. "And I may as well warn you that we're going to forbid the smoking of refuse about the corridors. What is the stuff? Oak leaves?"

"Oak leaves! A malison on you, scurvy knave. It stands me in four bob a pound." With a burst of laughter at the windy nonsense he talked with these younglings, he backed out of the room, followed by a shower of good-nights, in every one of which was a true benison.

"Isn't he a ripping old boy?" Phil said, admiringly. "Night, you chaps; thanks for coming. Had a great jaw."

Noisily they clattered into the corridor, pitching the sentinel boots of innocent, sleeping students down the stairs, in fine disarray. Phil shut the door, and turned to Peter.

"My hat, Peter, it scares me to think I might never have come to Queen's," he said.

"You wanted Trinity," Peter reminded him.

"Yes, what a priceless ass I was! Do you know I think I must have been one of the most hateful kids ever born! The Master's knocked a lot of the fool out of me. I hope he finishes with the job before I go down. Lord, won't we feel lost, when we leave."

"My word!" said the brief Peter, to whom rhapsody was foreign. "But we'll always have the old Boss to come to, if things get hard."

"Yes. It's great to think of that. He never preaches. A sermon 'd drive me dotty." Peter looked at him with amusement.

"You silly ass, you've been listening to one, for the last half-hour," he said.



## CHAPTER VIII

*"Here we sit in a branchy row,  
Thinking of beautiful things we know;  
Dreaming of deeds that we mean to do,  
All complete in a minute or two—  
Something noble and grand and good,  
Won by merely wishing we could."*

—ROAD-SONG OF THE BANDAR-LOG

TO commence Bachelor of Laws is a splendid achievement whose glory fades in inverse ratio as the years advance. At fifty it may seem a poor, futile occasion for such immense gratulation as stirs the heart of twenty-three. Philip and Peter were proud of their white hoods and rabbit fur, this auspicious Commencement Day. Peter went off to find his mother, who had come down with Jim to witness their boy's triumph. Philip, attracting many eyes, strolled about the Quad of the University, surreptitiously regarding the "hang" of his hood. As academical groups met and melted into changing geometrical figures, he compared it with others, forgetful that all were equally new.

Furtively he noted a classmate. Hang the fellow, he was wearing the elastic front loop round his third waistcoat button, bringing the hood much higher up the back. Phil had it round the top button. He turned away, and, under cover of reading the notices in the glassed-in Notice Case, he made the important change.

Unfortunately, the other man, quite as self-conscious as Philip, had also noted the discrepancy and made the necessary alteration. Phil, accordingly, was horrified, when he turned round to face the world, to find that he still required an Act of Uniformity to bring him into line with his fellows.

Neither Peter nor Phil had any great call to the Law. Neither had felt that imperious urge to definite selection of a path. They had arrived at a choice through elimination rather than desire. Their tastes and impulses were of the awkward kind, to which Medicine, Science, Engineering and the Technical Arts do not minister.

So it happened that the Law, august, chill, standing in dignified, almost marble majesty, was destined to see two insolent, puny figures climb her plinth; to feel them grasp her bleak, stony arm; drag themselves forward between her stately legs, and impudently pick out a landing spot on some infinitely lower plane beneath her.

Peter had found his parents, and joyfully haled them along to Philip.

Polly greeted Phil warmly, and it was positive that she meant to kiss him. He found a bootlace that had come undone at the critical moment.

"My word, and you have got a prize, too, Phil? How pleased your ma'll be. Is she here?"

"She's inside the Hall, Mrs. Wister," Phil told her. "Come on, and we'll get you a good seat. There's a big crowd." His manner to her was perfection, and it was a proud woman who entered the Hall, between two such specimens.

"Jim—angels," she said, as they sat down, and the boys left them to take their own seats on the dais. She pointed with a frank hand at the carved figures that decorated the ends of the great curved beams that formed part of the groining of the roof.

Her attention was caught by the sight of Peter on the dais, and she informed people for several seats around that that was her boy, the one with the red hair. He was a bachelor, she added, with a vague memory of the degree he was taking out. Jim, stolid, silent and observant, sat without a word, but he was too good-natured to spoil his Polly's happiness by any rebuke to her clattering tongue. This was her day, so, though he felt the acute unhappiness of a shy man, he made no remonstrance.

The Chancellor duly recited the "authority conferred

upon him," and "admitted Philip Pascoe Egerton Lee, Peter Wister," and some five other young men "to the degree of Bachelor of Laws of the University of Melbourne."

It was over. Hitherto they had paid fees. Now after a brief apprenticeship they would be authorized to take them. They pressed outside with the crowd, which eddied with apparent unintelligibility, until it threw them from its perimeter.

"Happy to meet you, Mr. Wister, LL.B.," grinned Phil, as they found themselves comparatively alone, and walked to sort the parent Wisters out of the welter.

"Oh, have I the pleasure of addressing the well-known barrister, Mr. P. P. E. Lee? I've heard of you, Mr. Lee. Didn't you save that poor man from the gallows, after the Crown indicted him for lighting a match on a policeman?" asked Peter, gravely.

"Fancy remembering that—a trifle," Phil rejoined, grandly. "Your firm, I am rejoiced to note, have done well in that Privy Council Appeal, Mr. Wister."

"Tolerably—tolerably—er—ten thousand pounds costs," and Peter broke into shouts of laughter, in which Philip joined.

"What a lark!" he said. Polly bore down upon them, leaving several ladies in her wake with angry feelings and maltreated corns.

"Jim's somewhere in there," she explained, and Phil dashed in to rescue the poor chap, who could have drafted a mob of wethers in half the time it took him to clear a space for his own progress.

"Now, tea," Phil announced. "You're my guests, and I'm going to blow you to something out of the ordinary. What do you say to a crayfish and beer?"

"Ain't it a bit early for crays—or late? Which is it?" inquired Polly.

"My dear Mrs. Wister," Phil informed her, "under competent legal advice, you may eat crayfish at any time without the least fear of consequences."

"Fancy that," said Polly, "and you wouldn't have

thought it would have made any difference. Come on, father, the beer'll buck you up."

Across the Oval they walked, Phil in his most ridiculous mood. Polly listened with amazement and delight to a story he told of Peter and the Chief Justice, in which it was made to appear that the tipstaff of that august official was sent to the lecture-room at the law courts to find Mr. Peter Wister forthwith and bring him before the Judge.

"Law, whatever for?" demanded Polly.

"That's right," shouted Phil. "You've guessed it."

"Me! I ain't said a word," declared the puzzled little woman.

"Yes. Law, you said. That's what Peter was wanted for. The Judge had met with a knotty point, and, of course being baffled and knowing of Peter—well, you see, how naturally it all came about. That's why they gave him his degree today."

"Well, I never. And Petey not writing a word about it," admired Polly. Mentally she was making notes for retailing the splendid history in Wandilla. Peter was explaining the various buildings to his father and missed the veracious account.

Randall hurried past them—the doctor who had stopped Peter's rowing career years before. He paused for a kindly word of congratulation, and praised Peter to his mother.

"What a nice young man," she said, as the doctor hurried on.

"One of the best," said Peter.

"He's in a tremendous hurry," she remarked. Phil grew grave.

"He always is," and his voice was wonderfully gentle. "He is going to die of T.B. in a few months, and he has a lot of work to get through before he goes. He knows exactly when his strength will oblige him to give up, you see, so he measures out his days. Pluck! There's no one like Randall. But it makes him always in rather a hurry."

There was unwonted silence till they were in the

study, and then the sadness passed away, and Polly's laugh of delight and enjoyment resounded through the empty corridors. They ate with zest their preposterous afternoon supper, and then Peter and Phil showed them around—the Chapel, the Common Room, Library, in all of which they professed to be interested, though it is doubtful if they understood the functions of any room except the Chapel. Then they came to the Dining Hall. A temporary proscenium occupied the dais, where ordinarily the High Table stood. It was being prepared for the Foundation Day Play, an annual celebration.

"Phil's going to be in it," Peter explained, "and you two'll have to be here early, because there's always a tremendous crowd."

"Then we'll have to be gittin' back to the hotel, for rest me feet, I'll have ter, along of these dratted noo boots," said Mrs. Wister. "Come on, father." She dragged him out of the room, and directed his attention to a huge wood bin that stood in the corridor, as being likely to engage his bucolic interest. Swiftly she turned to the young men, hauling at the string of a huge bag she carried. With a frown that was enough to shock them into secrecy she so evidently was enjoying, she removed a purse and abstracted from it a roll of notes, a slender roll, be it understood.

"Egg money," she said, in a whisper. "Boys is gen'ally short, especially when they ain't earnin' nothin'. Here, Peter, there's somethin' to go on, an' give Phil his share."

Phil saw with horror two pounds thrust into Peter's hand. He stepped forward, the gentle blood in him rising to what must only have sounded like a haughty refusal to the dear, simple country woman. Then he managed one of the finest things he ever did. With his exquisite smile he stopped and kissed Polly.

"My word, Mrs. Wister, you're the proper sort. We'll have a gorgeous burst on this, won't we, Peter? Thank you a hundred times."

Peter gave him a grateful look, and Mrs. Wister beamed.

"My! You'll be makin' Jim jealous, Phil," she smiled. "Come on, father, an' stop lookin' at them nigger weppins. You'll be dreamin' o' boomerangs an' spears t'night, 'specially after that crayfish."

The tram bore them away.

"That was jolly decent of you, old man," Peter said, gratefully. "I mean having them over, and getting that grub. Who told you the old boy was fond of a cray?"

"Heard you say it some time. I enjoyed them thoroughly. What a splendid little woman your mater is, Peter! Jolly sporting of her to weigh in with a tip like that."

Peter looked at him doubtfully. He did not wish to apologize for the gaucherie of his mother, but he sensed the sudden impulse of Philip to refuse her gift with a curtness that must have hurt her.

"You won't mind taking it, old chap? She looks on you as a brother of mine. That's how it is——"

Phil never did things by half. He spoke up quickly.

"Take it? Rather. You hand over my fair share, you beggar. We'll drink her health after the show to-night. The mater will be up. She didn't feel like coming over here this afternoon as well, or I'd have got her to meet your pater and mater. I didn't see her after the Commencement, in fact."

The Play would mark their severance from the College. Phil had taken an active part in managing the function. A very real gift and love for acting was his, and he liked nothing better than playing in the sort of piece the Master chose to stage on these occasions. Sometimes it would be a play of Shakespeare, sometimes a Restoration comedy, a Sheridan play, or one of his own rollicking translations of the Latin comic poets.

To-night Sheridan's "The Critic" had been prepared, and Phil was playing the part of Mr. Puff, the bombastic author, who proudly exhibits the final rehearsal of his play to the critics, Dangle and Sneer. Peter was not in the play. He utterly lacked the ability to imagine himself out of his own skin, and after trying him in a

small part Phil had reluctantly jettisoned him. He was free, therefore, to meet his parents again, while Phil dressed.

In the Common-room a professional labored, making up the actors, and adjusting costumes, sternly forbidding the grave Burleigh, for instance, to go on the stage with his tights wrong side before, and tactfully suggesting to another actor that modern evening pumps were not the usual wear for an Elizabethan sailor.

Excitement ran high, for a rumor gained ground that a very great personage in the theatrical world, a visiting manager whose company was playing in Melbourne, was coming. He had played in this very piece, when the great Charles Mathews was Mr. Puff, and he was anxious to revive memories. The costumer, who did work for the theater, had mentioned the performance, and caprice did the rest.

The very Chancellor who had admitted Phil into the honorable guild of lawyers that afternoon was to be the guest of honor.

Presently a nervous, shuffling, whispering crowd of very modern youths in fancy dress pressed into the narrow confines of the "wings," and listened impatiently to the Master's scholarly exposition of the place of Sheridan in English drama. Only thus could the unconquerable prejudice of Methodists against stage representations be sufficiently calmed to allow the performance. An annual battle raged, indeed, whenever the Foundation Day celebration came under discussion. And always the same sop was thrown to Cerberus—a ten minutes' lecturette, and then the dangerous play itself.

At last it was over, and the play could begin. Mr. Puff, Mr. Dangle and Mr. Sneer were free to walk on in front of the curtain and begin the expository dialogue, which culminates with the grandiloquent order from Mr. Puff—"Up curtain, and let us see what our painters have done for us."

Phil possessed all the splendid un-self-consciousness of a born actor. The people did not exist, save subconsciously. He was the vain, turgid Mr. Puff, absorbed

in showing the critics the marvelous ingenuity of his stage mechanism for representing the naval battle in which the Armada was destroyed. His look of painful interest as the red fire burnt on the toy ships created just exactly the ridiculous effect the author meant. Mr. Puff is the only one who cannot see that the thing is foolish. Any exhibition of humor on his part is fatal to the illusion.

The great theatrical man, who *was* there, leaned across to the Chancellor, whom he admitted to his acquaintance, and observed in a loud whisper:

"That boy's immense—immense." The Chancellor nodded. His lips were creased in joyous smiles. He was enjoying the creation of a greater master than ever the great manager would be, and the purest of pleasures possessed him. He certainly did not recognize in the strutting, posturing Puff the individual for whom he had that afternoon used "the authority conferred on him." Did not some cold premonitory breath pass over him, great ornament of the Law as he was, warning him that he was witnessing something that was for ever to snatch from the mistress he served a neophyte his own hands had dedicated to her service? Possibly not. If the spirit entrusted with the cold breath in question were actually there, it was probably chuckling with glee at the absurdity before it, or perhaps exchanging a word with the wraith of Sheridan himself, who surely must be interested in a scholarly exposition of his place in English drama, and possibly even in an excellent presentation of his plays.

The curtain fell. The audience melted away, for the most part to the studies, where cocoa and biscuits or in rare instances cakes and ale, were lying in state. The tired Phil, delighted beyond measure, had dashed up to his room to see if Peter had all his guests marshaled. He had barely time to speak to his mother, when a man came running.

"Phil! Mr. Puff! Puff! Mr. Ingleby is asking for you."

Now Ingleby was the very distinguished person.



Phil hastily excused himself, and hurried down the stairs. One of the penalties of successful acting is that it carries with it a love of applause. Never believe an actor who tells you he never reads the papers. Phil was intoxicated with the delicious incense he had received. The noise of hand-clapping even now lingered on the quivering air. The great man came a few steps to meet him.

"Ah! It's my young friend, who doesn't see his audience," was the friendly greeting of the great Ingleby.

Phil pressed the two fingers held out to him, most gratefully. He would have been charmed with one. Did he have any foresight of the day when he would offer the astounded Ingleby one finger in exchange? No whit more than a cold breath smote the Chancellor. These things have not happened since the mid-Victorians stopped writing.

"You have a gift, my boy—a great gift. Never go on the stage. I always tell aspirants that. Never dream of going on the stage. The way is difficult, and success is hardly come at. But if you should think of taking up the hard, terrible, wondrous, ennobling life of dramatic Art," and properly to render the emphasis and solemnity of the great Ingleby one should use capitals, "come and see me. Here is my card."

Into Philip's hand was thrust a pasteboard, with much the air as though it were a passport to heaven.

"I'm glad you enjoyed it, sir," said Philip.

"I didn't, my boy. These things never reach me now. I am beyond all sense of enjoyment from them. But I was struck by one or two things. You are ignorant—yes, you are tremendously ignorant," and the great Ingleby sucked in his breath with a shocked look at such depths of ignorance, "but you have the root of the matter in you. And never forget that, as we say in the profession, there is room at the top—room at the top," he repeated, as if those golden words deserved it. Phil might have retorted that those words are sometimes used by those not in the profession, but he was

laboring under a sense of gratitude and pride, and the great Ingleby had undoubtedly the right to talk rot, if he pleased. Who had a better?

He got away, after accepting the same two fingers, this time gloved smartly, and in the corridor he scanned the card, which gave the world the interesting information that the famous man was a member of the Savage Club, Adelphi, London.

He sped away, and listened as in a dream to the compliments and jests of his guests. His mother was stiffly affable to Polly, and pretended nobly an interest in the Davises, the Joneses, the Allans and several other Riverina families of which she had never heard. She made appropriate noises when informed of the price of stock in Deniliquin, and in short behaved in a perfectly charming, if vague, way.

At last they were all gone. Phil, in his tawdry finery, his brilliant painted cheeks, his powdered hair, was able to turn to Peter, who was murmuring all sorts of compliments he had overheard in the Hall.

"Peter," said Phil, "I have made up my mind what I want to be. I'm going on the stage."

"You're just the one to make a howling success, too," said Peter, loyally, but he felt an overwhelming dismay.

END OF BOOK I.

## BOOK II—KINDLING

### CHAPTER IX

*"Greeting! My birth-stain have I turned to good;  
Forcing strong wills perverse to steadfastness;  
The first flush of the tropics in my blood,  
And at my feet Success!"*

—SYDNEY: THE SONG OF THE CITIES

**P**HILIP LEE and two other unimportant members of a much-advertised English Comedy Company stood outside the gate, which, with its abominable gilt scroll-work, and surmounting spikes, hung ajar in dilapidated perpetuity.

"This is the place—No. 231," he said. "Now Gresham, it's up to you."

Gresham, a blue-chinned, unclean-shaven individual of fifty battered winters, stared at the grim three-story house, which stood on tip-toe at the head of six dirty steps, while ten more steps, dirtier still, and holding the accumulations of weeks of wind-blown manure and leaves in their corners, led down to the unimaginable horrors of a basement.

"Laddie," he objected, with a doubtful head-shake, "it looks like a thirty to me."

"P'raps she'll make a reduction for wholesale," suggested the third member of the party, a rather pretty girl, with a humorous twist in her knowing red mouth.

She looked down the uninviting Sydney street, where long lines of terraced monstrosities bad-temperedly elbowed each other downhill to where the shining harbor lay in the hollow.

"Lord, if that water wasn't there, it might be Pimlico, 'stead of Sydney."

Gresham mounted the steps and rang. A shuddering whine of loose wires, and a prolonged ringing of a distant bell, rewarded him. The sound dwindled to a mournful tolling conclusion, and a fierce little woman opened the door. She darted a suspicious, appraising glance at the caller, and flashed it on the two waiting outside. Then it took in their luggage.

"Well?" she snapped.

"Er—in the matter of rooms——," began Gresham, stepping forward with a courtly gesture that swept his flopping felt hat from his head.

"No theatricals!" said the woman. It might possibly have been a rebuke to the large gesture with which Gresham hoped to ingratiate himself, but, as she stepped back and closed the door, it was more likely meant as an intimation that no actors need apply.

Philip's voice raced the closing door.

"Surely that is Mrs. Bignett herself," he said, and smiled. There may have been women who did not like Philip's smile. Mrs. Bignett was not of their number. For her daily combats with the predatory members of the human race she donned an armor of spiky steel, but somewhere hidden behind it was a remnant of a woman. The door just failed to click, and the fierce little person opened it a crack.

"That's me," she announced; "what of it?"

"Only that we come recommended," continued Philip, mounting the steps, to pursue his advantage. "Mr. Bert Leonard—you remember Leonard, Mrs. Bignett?"

"Feller as tied himself int' knots at the 'Aymarket? I remember 'im. Well?"

"He said to us, before we left London—'231 Gipps Street, Potts Point, when you get to Sydney, and Mrs. Bignett, the best cook, and the best sort in the city, and tell her I sent you, with my love.' And here we are, just off the boat, and simply dying for a meal like you gave Leonard the day he sailed. We've heard all about it."

"'E was a fair terror, was Bert," she conceded. The door opened a little wider. "But as a general rule, mind you, I don't take in actors—don't keer fer 'em."

Philip smiled.

"And to speak strictly, Mrs. Bignett," he confided, "we're not asking you to break a rule. My friend, Mr. Gresham, is no actor, believe me, and Miss Sefton and I are simply too awful for words."

"I'll show you the rooms; they ain't done out to-day, but you c'n take 'em or leave 'em." Her tone was truculent, but there was a faint hint of a concession. "Top floor, an' right at th' back, but they're all I kin do. I got permanent commercials in the best. You an' the lady married?" she asked, suddenly.

"Oh, not a bit," the girl hastily replied.

"I said—'Miss Sefton,'" reminded Philip.

"I heerd ye, but I've knowed plenty stage 'Misses' wi' weddin' rings an' fam'lies. All right, on'y all I ses is this—no tricks. Leave your bags. If ye don't take th' rooms, they'll be handy here, an' if ye do, 'E'll carry 'em up stairs."

"And the terms?" asked Gresham, the cautious.

"Twenty-five, an' little enough," said Mrs. Bignett, defiantly.

"Splendid," approved Philip, beaming. "From the look of the house, I should have guessed thirty."

Something unusually warm throbbed in the landlady's bosom, as she led the way, with staccato jumps, upstairs. Her frozen heart had had a human finger laid upon it.

"Here's one room: I hopes ye like it," she said to Philip, adding immediately, with her defiant air, "it's a good room, too, if it is small."

"This'll do me, Mrs. Bignett. By Jove! it'll be nice to have a home again after tossing for six weeks in a wretched two by four cabin."

She looked him in the eyes, her lips thin an compressed. He stood the ordeal well, and even flashed another smile at her. A pale, wavering crinkle stirred the corners of her lips.

"Here's the other rooms," she said, quickly, leading

the way round an angle of the building. She was aware that for one fleeting second she had lost her grip as a boarding-house proprietor.

After inspection, they agreed to take the rooms, and discussed final arrangements at the narrow stairhead. Almost against her will, Mrs. Bignett glanced at Philip, an arresting personality in any group, but as much out of place in this dingy refuge as the Antinous in a bar-parlor.

"Got all ye want?" she asked, and a faint, rosy tinge of cordiality was in her voice, like the first, tentative, green spike pushing its way through a frozen garden-bed.

"Rather, and very many thanks," Philip assured her.

"Me terms is a week in advance," announced the landlady, crisply, drawing her foot smartly back from a precipice of trustfulness, over which Philip's smile had nearly lured her.

"Take this then, Mrs. Bignett." He handed her a five-pound note. "Let the change run on for next week."

"Are you expeekin' to be 'ere long?" she inquired.

Gresham, silent over-long, answered the question, with a grandiloquent wave of the hand.

"We are the servants of the public, dear lady," he said, richly. "If our masters say 'Stay!' we are fain to obey."

("Feller up ther torks po'try like a book," Mrs. Bignett confided to her sister, with whom she "ran" No. 231.)

"Well, dinner's at one," she instructed them.

"'E'll bring up yer traps."

"Who?" asked Philip, curiously.

"'Im. Me 'usband," she elucidated. Later they found that this gentleman, when he parted from his last job, parted from his name. His local habitation would have followed, too, had not a spasm of prudential pity induced his wife to keep him for odd work. He lived on an island of loneliness, washed by exceeding bitter seas. An object of contempt to wife and sister-

in-law, a contagious emotion which communicated itself to the boarders, he was boots, knife-cleaner, garbage-man, messenger-boy, porter and scapegoat to the establishment. He was addressed as "You there!" and referred to as "'E." He ate in the kitchen of unwanted morsels, and expiated, in an underworld pervaded by the smells of boiled cabbage, blacking, kitchen scraps and rancid fats, a nature which had once been free enough to abhor regular paid work.

This unhappy soul presently staggered upstairs with the last valise of the new boarders.

"Thanks, old chap," Philip said, pleasantly, and tossed him a shilling. A greasy hand caught it clumsily, pursuing it to a resting-place on a front elevation, draped by a spotty, brown waistcoat, many sizes too large. His red eyes opened widely, and his ragged, untidy moustache twitched with sudden emotion.

"Fer me?" he asked, huskily.

"Of course," Philip told him.

"Then not a word to 'er," warned "'E." "She's a noly terror, that's wot she is." He deposited the coin, with infinite slyness, into some Safe Deposit in his frayed, filthy jacket, whence it would have taken a person not over-particular to have filched it. Then, with shuffling footsteps he returned to the obscure fastness where he passed his joyless existence.

It was eighteen months since the great Ingleby had given his fateful card to Philip. The defection of an unimportant member of the cast had given him an opening, and after the close of the Australian season, he had gone on to South Africa and India with the company, being dismissed in London nine months later.

Terrible periods of "rest" followed, interspersed with humiliating and scanty work. Then came a time of starvation, quite in the approved style of melodrama. The experience acted curiously on him. One would have thought that the actor's vocation was his crowning ambition, to achieve which he was prepared to explore the deeps of misery.

The real fact was that, up to the very minute before

the summons came to him to receive the distinguished Ingleby's congratulations the thought of a stage career had never entered his mind. The excitement of a small success, just at the time he was about to choose some outlet for his powers, had worked on a clever youth's natural vanity. Impulse, which ever had undue effect in his life, whirled him off his feet and deposited him on the stage, before he well realized the fact.

Then his curious nature began to function true to its type. Quite in the old way, he dramatized himself. He was the famous actor, in a famous club, telling with incomparable humor and lack of "side" his experiences at the outset of his career. As a star of magnitude, he rose in various countries, in the intervals of striking London successes. These and companion pictures were ever before his eyes, and a will-power that would never acknowledge itself beaten, but was resolved to hang on till success came, had its share in making him stick.

Possibly, too, the lack of a definite *motif* in life, and the schoolboy code that bade the player of a game play his damndest were factors in his determination. In a subconscious way there may have been a striving for self-expression going on in his mind, and his acting may have been a sort of groping towards an outlet.

The fact remains that the things which generally disgust the uninitiated tyro only made him the more determined to wring success out of an unpromising profession. Love for it he had none, in the common acceptation of the term. His fastidious, cleanly mind felt spasms of distaste for some of the circumstances with which he was in daily contact. The easy Christian names; the cheapness; the tawdriness; the strong friendships that so easily became enmities as strong; quarrels that sought the publicity of a law-court; the disappointment of seeing a nice, juicy little fat part given to an incompetent inferior; the damning inefficiency of some stage managers; a supercilious leading man, "killing" a laugh that interfered with his own importance; all these things sickened him with his job.



But he held on doggedly through it all. Perhaps the other side of the picture, the kindliness and generosity of the stage-folk to their fellows in adversity; the occasional small success, which got a sudden round of applause from the mysterious darkened house; the spasmodic jollity of the easy-going company; the amazing interest of a new place or a fresh play, before repetition had staled it, all combined to prevent him bolting to more stable conditions.

Once, in London, he touched bottom. Without a "shop," in a deadly, dull season, when the Strand was full of prowling actors on the look-out, he was literally without a penny. He would have sold ribbons, but shops had no need for inexperience when bad times had put even experience on the streets.

With paper "borrowed" from the O.P. Club, to which he had been introduced a while before by a member, he wrote a short story. In it he imitated his favorite author of the moment. He was disgusted to learn that several London Editors did not care for imitations. He tore up the thing savagely, and scattered the pieces on the dun water flowing past the Embankment, while bright music and laughter fluttered out of the brilliant open windows of the Cecil hard by. He watched the paper turn a dirty yellow in the electric light, as it slowly soaked up Thames water, and wondered dully whether it wouldn't be better to accompany his story.

Once more he interviewed the great Ingleby, who shot off two platitudes and three truisms from his wonderful book just about to be published—"How I Became a Great Manager," and then dismissed him, without even the spiritual comfort of one finger to shake.

A prostitute, misled by his unquestionable air of a gentleman, took him home and fed him innocently when she found that he was in a worse plight than she. The entire race of prostitutes was raised a peg in his mind thereafter. Three days he spent in her bed, in a fever brought on by inanition; and it was from a friend of hers that he learned of the fitting out of a privateering expedition to Australia—an English Comedy Company,

headed by a "Leading London Actor," who had never played a larger city than Birmingham, and a Leading Lady who had once understudied Mrs. Pat Campbell. An unexpected legacy made the tour possible. They shared the risks equally with the Australian theatrical firm, under whose auspices they were to appear. Cheapness was their watchword. Their net dredged deep in the professional underworld of London, and luckily Philip was not too deep to be caught. He snapped up the meagre salary offered. The leading lady liked his looks.

Gresham was the comedian, an excellent laughter-maker, who had led a tragic life. The soubrette was Mazie Sefton. The priceless gift of Mrs. Bignett's address was Mr. Leonard's contribution to the tour at a "send-off" in their Bloomsbury boarding-house. Mr. Leonard was in residence there in temporary single state. A contortionist, he had entangled his heart in the charms of a fellow-artist, and the version of the affair, that was even then engaging the attention of the Divorce Court, was that the lawful Mrs. Leonard had come in and discovered her erring husband with the lady! Leonard, in an excess of love and poetry, had tied himself into a true lover's knot. The story may not be true.

Mazie fell in love with Philip, and conceived she had the right to feel insulted when, the night before they sailed Philip greeted with enthusiasm in Torrington Square a lady who was advertising her profession rather floridly. Coldly, on an arid peak of unassailable virtue, sat Mazie, her laughter-loving little mouth set in bleak, unforgiving lines, while Philip explained that the lady in question was his rescuer, and he had to say good-bye. But there are conventions about these things, and Philip had outraged them.

In a natural, human way that Philip had not the heart to rebuff, Gresham gravitated to him. A serious figure of a man, with a stage courtliness picked up from the gods of the last generation, when an actor could not ask for a match except in blank verse, he kept his humor

for professional purposes only, and truly believed that jokes were solemn things whose bouquet could only be savored over footlights, with the odor of size and stale cigar-smoke to create an atmosphere, just as champagne out of a tumbler is as insipid as ginger-ale.

He had an infernal habit that tried Philip extremely. He would take the end of his long, aquiline nose in a tobacco-stained forefinger and thumb, and wring a drop of moisture from that suffering organ with a torturing twist of the fingers. He was in the habit of telling Philip that his line was funny without being vulgar. He perhaps thought it only just, when off the stage, to be vulgar without being funny.

They traveled second-class, with the exception of the two stars. Ten other members of "an exclusive London cast, engaged at enormous expense to present the overwhelming English success, 'A Night with James,'" traveled with them. Had the boat gone down, not a ripple would have wrinkled the theatrical pool of London. Still, that is how advertising and publicity men speak. Worse still, it is even how they think.

And now, behold them arrived, drifting off to the cheap boarding-houses of Potts Point, whence they travel by tram each morning to rehearsal. "Calls" were constant, only a week being left before the opening, to bring to perfection what had been commenced by rehearsals in London.

The First Night came and went. The leading man did not get ill, and Philip was not asked to take his place at a moment's notice, the papers next morning ringing with his praise. How often he had visualized that splendid possibility! The notices were uniformly laudatory. In most countries theatrical criticism is perfunctory, a reflex of the advertising given to the papers. It is the Commercial Editor who really conditions the Art criticism. In Australia, there are few exceptions to the rule.

Philip and some of the other members of the company were made honorary members of the Greenroom Club. Here he wrote his few letters, and spent an hour

after the show. Here, too, he learned some facts about the theatrical world he was entering from Stines, an explosive, dynamic person who was an actor not in favor with the leading employing firms. Chronically dissatisfied, eternally harping back to the last generation, as the ideal in his Art, as he called it, he had constituted himself a walking delegate, never so happy as when he had embroiled a team with the management. Philip listened to him with amusement, and noted from the smiles of the listeners that Stines need not be taken too seriously.

"The theater!" he snorted, contemptuously. "Don't talk to me about the theater in Australia."

"Pretty good shows, Stines, whatever you may say. I've seen plenty of plays put on here just as well as they do it on the other side. And you can't say you don't get the best."

"Suppose we do, what the hell's that got to do with the price of eggs? We want more competition. Here we have three firms that simply have the Australian public in a bag. Call that competition? I tell you we had better shows in the old mining 'forties than you're getting now. Old Brookes and dear old Coppin did give us the stuff. Now the poor public is fed with blasted revues, and they're told by every publicity man that they must like it because the London public eat it up, and Broadway has gone crazy over it. London! London's the easiest public to gull in the world. And Broadway! I've seen shows applauded there that would have got the bird in Dead Dog Diggings."

He gave a snarl of disgust. Another man gave him a lead.

"You can't growl if you get the best there is," he said.

"What do we get?" Stines shouted. "If a feller has a good show abroad and wants to bring it in here, what chance has he got unless he stands in with Masters, or with M. J. Field? Just let him try it. He wouldn't even get a theater. What's that old tag about the gods sending a chap potty before they out him for good?"

That's what would happen to an independent showman here. Trusts! Trusts!"

"But if they bring you shows from the other side, what kick have you got, old man?" someone asked.

"How the hell are we goin' to develop a theatrical art of our own if we're always fobbed off with tripe that's only good enough to please the half-educated public the London Board Schools turn out?" the fiery objector exploded. "We can't even produce here. We import the whole show, from the company and producer to the damnation chalk-marks on the stage, in case some super steps six inches nearer to the footlights than was done in New York. It's atrophy, that what it is, atrophy," he repeated, delighted at having got hold of a new word. "Like a monkey refusin' to use his tail so long that he finally wakes up an' finds his descendants haven't got any. Atrophy. Ask Herbert Spencer."

The play was a success, and this was not without its effect. It gave Philip freedom from daily rehearsals, and a leisure that he utilized in exploring the city and the harbor, whose bewildering quality it is that you may find fresh beauty-spots after a month of enjoyment, each new discovery more enthralling than the last.

The picturesque bullock-tracks of old Sydney, which have with slipshod lack of planning grown into narrow canons of streets, each teeming with cosmopolitan life, were a never-failing stimulus to him. Sydney is the Capital of the South Seas, a nodule in which is concentrated many strings of traffic from all parts of the globe. On Circular Quay, where the myriads of electric trams shuttle backwards and forwards intricately; to whose immense wharves the commerce of many oceans comes, he feasted mind and eyes on many things which were to stay with him and influence the texture of his thought. He wandered on to Island boats, smelling of exotic archipelagoes, where spices scent the air; where strange, dusky beauty haunts cocoanut groves with gleaming, elusive glimpses of flashing bronze limbs; where white-clad, pith-helmeted masters drink cold decoctions, on wide, airy verandahs. He

watched the unloading of Japanese mailboats, whereon the sight of the tiny, lithe, brown men called up visions of temple bells at sunrise, of cherry-blossom in a flush of beauty, of Fujiyama, slowly reddening to crimson glory in the dying fires of the sun and fading back to cold, white purity. American liners disgorged pell-mell, sophisticated, curious, impatient crowds of people in a hurry, smartly gowned as to the women, caricatures of a tailor's nightmare as to the men, incisive of speech, and outdoing the "chiel" in "takin' notes."

All this filled his mind with a romantic glow. The real "*cacoethes scribendi*" began its pleasant torture at this period. He had forgotten, or ignored, the fate of his first story. He read voraciously, a pocket edition of some sort or other being always with him.

His taste was catholic. Borrow's "Lavengro" one day would give place to an abominable translation of one of Guy de Maupassant's stories the next. This latter he pitched into the harbor. Afterwards he found that it was the translator, pandering to a debased taste, who should have been so treated. In the original he could not recognize the carefully selected filth of the so-called copy. Rabelais he could not endure. Its greatness he could not understand. His innate fastidiousness, which would not admit certain things even to itself, revolted at the plain speech of the old doctor. George Eliot, Jane Austen and rollicking old Tobias Smollett he thoroughly enjoyed. Curiously enough, there were parts of "Tom Jones" he didn't like, and Sterne disgusted him. Casanova, a rare copy of whose memoirs he picked up at a bookstall, made him shout with laughter. Something in him reached out friendly fingers to the old rascal, pathetically re-living his scandalous, joyous life over again, striving with the pen to re-capture "the first, fine careless rapture." But, save in the abstract, sex had as yet little appeal to him. He read, and he stared, and he thought, and if you had asked him his ambition, he would have replied that to be a leading man in a good company was good enough for him. He was twenty-five years old.

## CHAPTER X

*"If we fall in the race, though we win, the hoofside is scarred,  
on the course,  
Though Allah and Earth pardon Sin, remaineth for ever  
Remorse."*

—CERTAIN MAXIMS OF HAFIZ

**M**AZIE SEFTON was one of that numerous class of women, who are perfectly natural in their emotions of sex. She knew nothing of the education that warps a child's real nature, twists the truth of sex knowledge, and holds up as beastly a fundamental element in men and women, which is as beautiful and seemly as the flight of birds South.

Ninety per cent of boys and girls are, consciously or unconsciously, brought up to believe that marriage is an inherent indecency for which a permit is required for a purpose that must never be spoken of. But what must never be spoken of must quite often be thought about. When secrecy attends all the rites of marriage, except the one that launches it on a privily sniggering world, curiosity is sure to be unhealthily stimulated.

To Mazie, however, the mysteries of sex were no mysteries. She had grown up in healthy knowledge of facts. For her no prying and peering, no whispering and giggling had been necessary, and as a result her mind was a hundred times cleaner and more sane than those of thousands of her sisters, who had lived what is called a sheltered life. She knew men, she considered. Perhaps she did. Girls in her situation have sources of knowledge denied to others. Her creed was "All men are rotters!" It would surprise men to find that most chorus girls and their kind, who have opportunities

for judging, have arrived at the same conclusion. They act, as Mazie acted, on the assumption that men are guilty till they are proved innocent.

Such girls often form, for all their wisdom, the most unfortunate connections. They are hurried, sometimes by emotion, sometimes by dire necessity, the will-to-live, into bohemian alliances with "friends." They are alone in the world; the problem is often put with brutal directness to their minds. It's a chance. If it fails, they hurt no one but themselves.

Mazie thought with contempt of the silly, soppy fools that give to rotters of men such a tremendous gift for nothing. Till she met Philip, she had held her emotions in with a tight rein. Supper after the show was one thing; a girl had to see that some fellow got her meals at least once a day. The salary wouldn't run to it, unless it were eked out by such means. But catch her paying for it. Oh, no, not this little girl! She laughed at entreaties, raged when "fellows" "pulled her about," and was not above hitting smartly with her peggy-bag, if they went too far.

An adventuress? Yes, I suppose so. Until the world is made over again, with a share for all, some women must adventure to live at all.

With the coming of Philip into her life, she experienced a change of thought. She fell in love with his good looks, his courage, his pleasant manners, which were the same to her as to a queen. How could she help but love him? She would have counted herself the happiest women in the world if she had been married to him. Hardships they would have laughed at. But she had no illusions. Gentlemen did not marry her sort, unless they were the kind that hung around the stage-door, half-screwed. She didn't want that style, thank you. Not for Mazie.

But, if Philip could be made to love her, perhaps as long as they were working together they could be pals, and get a flat. It wouldn't cost more than boarding. With the directness of the female of the species, living under natural laws, she began to allure. She calculated



the effect of a dress, a stocking, an ankle. Your good woman may sneer, but without the honest directness of Mazie, her methods are the same. More elusive, more subtle, she yet studies the whole art of allure. Woman's dress, her powder, her salve, her backward glances are all in the last analysis part of the eternal game of "come-and-catch-me." The only difference is that in the case of Mazie Sefton she had to work fast, and that cost her something in subtlety.

Philip was unconscious of her broadest effects. An athlete, keen on keeping fit, walking miles every day, with a mind active, and kept sweet by good reading, he was little likely to return the passion of the ignorant, crude, little wild-flower who had only one thing to offer to his manhood.

The game went on, and looked hopeless for Mazie. Then, one night at the theater, a man waited for her—a creature of the front stalls, a creeping, crawling thing that made war on girls of the stage, in the mistaken belief that they were all immoral. Mazie resisted him, "told him off proper," but he seized her arm. Possibly, by some misadventure, he nipped her flesh in his ring. She called out—a tiny scream.

Unfortunately, Philip was coming out of the door. The little cry of distress reached him. He took in the situation, and assumed the most damnably dangerous position on earth; he became a knight-errant.

It wasn't a fight. It was a *débâcle*. Mazie had nothing to be really grateful for. The cur, after his kind, would have scampered off, anyway. But woman loves to be protected. She thrills to the male who fights for her. Instead of going off to his club, Philip, privately bored, took her home on the tram.

The next night she pretended to be frightened. One word, and he took her home as before. He remained, while she turned on the gas in her room.

"Come on in," she invited, "and have a yarn."

"Too sleepy, old girl," he replied, and yawned a good-night.

She was under no illusion as to his feelings, but she

thought that, with the gift she could give him, love would come. She could not know that, if it is not there at the time, it never comes later.

Then, as luck would have it, he grew a little seedy. For two nights he was out of the cast. She nursed him in the day-time, and after the show she would run in and tell him the commonplaces of the theater. It even ran to some fruit the second night. He scolded her. She glowed. He would have been a coxcomb not to have known he had made a conquest. Twenty-five may have unsuspected resistant powers, but the calculation of chances would always run against persistence.

The illness left him with a legacy of insomnia. He lit the gas, and read. A light-well separated his room from Mazie's. His light had hardly flashed on before she had her head out of the window.

"Anything wrong, Phil?" she whispered, across the six-foot chasm.

"No, it's all right. I just can't sleep," he called, softly. "Go back to bed. You'll get your death of cold."

She went obediently back. Next day, she said:

"I say, what's the use of your lying there feeling blue, when I could slip in and yarn to you?"

He scolded her, but the idea sounded attractive. The hours were long.

"Anyway, say what you like, I'm coming in next time you turn your light on," she warned him.

For three nights he lay, tossing in the dark. The thought of her, sweet and white, came to him, a very real temptation. What a dear kid she was! She'd looked after him so well. They were bohemians anyway. Scores of people were a law unto themselves. Besides, they need only pow-wow. P'raps, it would make him sleepy.

A week's inaction had lowered his power of fighting the insidious suggestion. His sexual experiences had been only mental hitherto, kept to himself by the foolish practice of society in forbidding frank discussion on any topic bordering on what it persists in regarding

as indecent. An hour's freedom in which to unburden himself to some understanding person would have revealed to him things which would have enabled him to smile in the darkness at the pathetic attempts of this girl to tie him to her, to shrug indifferent shoulders, and possibly to drop off into dreamless sleep.

As it was, he argued with himself. Then he drew the clothes about his ears, with a gesture meant to be final.

"Confound the thing, what a bounder and cad I'd be!" he thought.

He counted sheep. He went over his part in the new play. It was no use. His vanity thrilled to the thought that Mazie was probably lying awake in the darkness, just as he was. He began to wonder if she were.

"I could easily see, but I'm damned if I will," he thought, again, and considered that he had settled the matter.

A short half-minute later, he sprang up and lit the gas.

It lasted less than a week. A tender gratitude to the girl who had proved so much love made for him almost an illusion of the real thing. He seemed to have attained his manhood. His gestures took on greater assurance, a wider freedom; he walked as one who walks with kings. Privately he wondered that people did not read in his eyes of his graduation in manhood. What would Peter say? It was the thought of Peter that marked the decline of the brief romance, which was only a poetizing of the senses. Peter's clear, honest eyes suddenly came before him in a flood of painfully clear recollection.

Peter would be incapable of furtive visits, along dingy lodging-house corridors. Philip flushed. He experienced the loathing that comes with satiety, where no love is. He felt the bitterness of realizing the weakness that surrenders to the first real attack. How often had he overheard the recital in dressing-rooms of episodes no

more unsavory than this, and crawled with disgust at the thought! He had prided himself on his freedom from "all that sort of thing," not reflecting that no credit can be taken for freedom from temptation. Fastidiousness had been his buckler. Sordidness revolted him like a bad smell. Commonness was a vile thing like the touch of unclean garments.

He sought and told Mazie his whole thought, with marvelous innocence expecting her to rise to his heights, which were only scaled under the impetus of satiety and aroused fastidiousness. He mentioned the hatefulness of slinking along corridors. On that she fastened.

"We can easily get a room together," she soothed him.

"But I don't love you, old girl, and the whole thing's too beastly for words." He cut her, and cut her deep. But she was cured, after the wound had healed. She uttered a pathetic hope for the future.

"Never in the wide world," shuddered young Galahad; "I've finished with all that sort of thing. Some day I'm going to marry, and I want to be fairly decent, you know."

She flamed into jealousy.

"Who is she?" she demanded.

"I don't know," Philip said; "but somewhere there is a woman I will marry—miles above me in character—beautiful, of course; but that doesn't matter like her strength. She'll be strong enough for us both. I'm going to do big things just for her."

Poor Philip! The first time a man has to make the humiliating confession to himself that he is weak, and needs another's strength, is a bitter occasion.

The experience was over. Mazie took refuge in offended dignity. But she never attempted to reopen the incident. Philip suffered a bit, but his hurts were tempered by the unexpected acceptance of an essay he had written for a literary monthly.

He was a stylist. He had a conception of the art of writing that was more in accord with the French *precieuses*, than modern literature. He would spend an hour at a time in manicuring his sentences, packing meaning

into words, snipping out a redundancy there, polishing a phrase here. An adjective was rejected, unless he could compress into its compass a whole paragraph. It was a style that had as much chance of normal sale as green moon cheese has of becoming a marketable commodity, but it nevertheless possessed a distinction that marked it off from much current Australian literature. The Editor of "The Oracle" accepted it. He was of the old school, and loved to examine his reading with a pickaxe.

Flushed with success, he tried another of the same genre. Unwilling to wait for a month, he sent this to a flippant, clever weekly—"The Arrow." A feature of this paper is its shattering, devastating "Answers to Correspondents" column. A week later, over his initials, Philip had the pleasure of reading the following gentle, helpful criticism:—

"We regret to inform P.P.L. that he died a great many years ago. We have buried the bit of him that came to this office, in the W.P.B., the obsequies being presided over by the office cat. We advise him to complete the job."

With an earnestness that he always brought to apparently failing causes, Philip altered his ponderous style to one a little less portentous, but which still had the flavor of dried pemmican about it, and sent the same Editor another sketch.

Its point was serious, its theme slightly ethical. It was published, but its balanced periods were cut abominably; its glowing words exchanged for the most banal Australian slang; the whole spirit subtly altered, and a flippant, pagan air put in its place. It was a diabolical piece of cleverness, an outrageous liberty, and it culminated in a surprise ending that made a jest of the thing that formed the main theme. A check was sent him for the contribution.

He never forgave editor or paper. A bitterness quite unreasonable sprang up against anyone who habitually wrote for it, and he was wont to refer to it later as "the worst influence in Australian literature." As the

paper prides itself on the creation of an Australian literature, it may be considered that honors were easy.

If success was small, the exercise was good, and Philip's mind was definitely turned to writing. It was some time before the direction of his bent was defined. It dissipated itself in desultory attempts, while it was testing itself, so to speak. An opportunity came, that imparted a more restricted impetus.

"A Night with James" was taken off. A piece was put on which had dramatic force, a fair amount of bright dialogue, and good parts for the principals. It was hailed with delight by the Commercial Editor's agents, but, even with this enlightened commendation, it did not draw the public. Nothing definite could be pointed out as the cause of its failure, but it held the audience just for the first two acts. Then began the coughing, shuffling, and blowing of noses that every actor recognizes as a sure sign that a play has ceased to "get across."

Philip's part was small. He was free after the Second Act, and generally went off to the Club. There he heard the play denounced in general terms, condemned with that hard-worked adjective "rotten." The following night he went round to the stage box, and sat down. The Second Act was just ending. The house was "thin," but, to that point, appreciative.

The Third Act began. So did the shuffling. Suddenly Philip sat up. Laughter that had been continuous had dried up. Why? There must be a reason. He brought a fresh mind to bear on the problem, instead of his usual one, jaded by rehearsals and repetitions.

He went round to the manager in the box-office.

"Mr. Morrison," he said, "I know what's the matter with that play."

"So do I," said Morrison, gloomily. "It's damn bad, otherwise it's all right. Take out the plot, the dialogue, and you b—— awful actors, and it'd be all right. It's bad, laddie, it's bad."

"Not a bit of it—at least," Philip corrected himself, "only a bit of it."

"That bit's quite enough for us, my gay bucko," the

manager said. "If the public won't come, the play's bad. That's my maxim, and it goes, even with William Q. Shakespeare," he ended, emphatically, his voice taking on the crisp accents of his native village.

"It's the Third Act," announced Philip. "The trouble is that the play finishes long before it's over. It ends at the Second. The audience might as well go home then, but you won't let 'em, and they resent it."

Morrison looked at him without speaking. Then he turned to the cashier, Maxby.

"You hear that, George?" he asked.

"It sounds good horse sense to me," said Maxby.

"You've said a mouthful when you've said that. It sounds good sense to me, too. But it don't get us out of the hole. It may be nice to know you're ten miles out on a lonely road with a balky horse, an' it's a real pleasure to find a stranger weighing in with the information that what's wrong with the animal is that he's balky, but you ain't any nearer home. The only thing to do with that play is to end it just before the beginning of the First Act."

"Look here, what's wrong with my tinkering with it, and putting it right?" Philip asked.

"My dear chap, you can do it with Shakespeare. You might even do it with—what's that feller who wrote 'The Rivals'? Oh, damn it, and I produced it once—Galsworthy. You can do it to them. They're dead, and they can't kick. You could re-write 'Hamlet' as a farce-comedy and get away with it, but you just try dotting an 'i' of a modern play. The author'll set a lawyer on you first thing you know. Bernard Shaw killed a feller once for saying 'of' instead of 'for.'"

"Why not let 'em kick?" inquired Philip. "Do you stage these shows to help them or yourself? How will the man ever hear of what we do?"

"By the living Jingo, I think the kid's right," shouted Morrison, eating his cigar more rapidly, in his excitement. He touched a bell. A boy appeared.

"Ask Mr. Mason to come here," he barked. You

always bark at underlings in a theatre. It shows who's the boss.

In due time Mason, the leading man, appeared.

"Mason, this show is bum as it is. We're going to scare it up a bit. What think?"

"My part goes well," said Mason.

"Your part! Oh, hell!" growled Morrison. "This ain't a question of your part. It's a question of everybody's meal tickets. You got an interest in the investment, an' it's only fair you should be asked your opinion. But don't talk about your part."

"Well, I won't agree to——," he began.

"Who's asking what you agree? You'll be told what you're to do. Tell him," he ordered Philip, and turned away in disgust.

Philip explained.

"The whole crisis takes place too early," he said. "If the tension were kept up, so that at the end of the Second Act the audience did not know you were to be forgiven by Miss Rolfe, they would be more interested in Act Three. If a bit were written in, and the reconciliation kept for the final curtain, the play wouldn't end till then. See what I mean? We could keep the Second Act 'tag' for the end. The effect would be miles better."

Mason chewed it over.

"Yes. It certainly would give me a big punch at the last curtain. But Thorpe would throw a fit," he said at length. Thorpe was the author.

"Never knew a more convenient place for a fit than a lump of dirt thirteen thousand miles away," growled Morrison. "We should worry about Thorpe. You an' Miss Rolfe'll be throwing a fit clean out of your contracts if you can't get this damn stuff across better'n you've bin doin'."

"And who will make the alteration?" demanded Mason.

"I will," declared Philip.

"Well, we can but try," agreed the actor, gloomily, "though my part must not be altered in essentials."



"Get to it, Kiddo," commanded Morrison; "let's have it to-morrow. Here's the script."

A manager would have wanted "Hamlet" two days after it was begun.

Philip's version was rehearsed.

The result was satisfactory. The coughing ceased; people talked, attendances increased, and Morrison beamed. He paid Philip fifteen shillings extra next Treasury. Sometimes Art needs a Trades-union.

The immediate effect on Philip was to turn his facile mind to play-writing. The unique experience of hearing others repeat words he himself had penned, and an audience laugh at jokes he had invented, was delicious. He visioned characters who would utter the thoughts that came crowding into his mind, and in that fertile time between waking and speaking he fashioned brilliant epigrams that sparkled delightfully, but eluded his memory by morning. That is the hour when our best speeches are made, when we think of a phrase of repartee that would have shattered our opponent at the club the night before, when the most telling shafts of invective push up into our consciousness. What books, what plays might not be written, if only those fading thoughts and elusive dialogues could be retained!

Philip's efforts were but play-time work, however. He still thought that he was destined to rise to heights in his own chosen profession. His chief asset was a voice of splendid range and power, the sort that leads a stranger to remark that it would be a wonderful singing voice—velvet, tender, with that hint of force in reserve which is so useful in an actor.

He had made friends in Sydney. His personality had carried over the footlights, even in the small part he had, and some people in his own social class had asked to be introduced to him. In his small circle he was a success.

It happened naturally enough, therefore, that when a gigantic charity matinee was planned by a bevy of people who see in Charity a fine source of advertisement, Philip should be approached to help.

"What a magnificent Beaucaire he would make," an enthusiastic girl on the Committee said, clasping her hands in delight. "We must have 'Monsieur Beaucaire.'"

As well that as anything. Philip, free once more in the daytime, felt something of his old enthusiasm return as he read the part and saw himself in it, clad in the white satin dress of Beaucaire. His actor's blood stirred. He swashbuckled in mind. In the end, he arranged the whole thing, partly with amateurs, partly with good-natured professionals. The big theatrical firm of Masters and Edwards lent a theater, and a packed, perspiring, fashionable audience bought outrageously expensive sweets for the Cause, and munched patiently after their kind till the curtain went up.

There was a *furor*. To say he made good would be a poor description. It was a riot. He shone—he sparkled—he laughed—he confounded. Everything he did was in tune. His grace was a thing to wonder at—ancestors a hundred years dead quickened and lent him their own charm.

Ten times the curtain went up, and the tall, infinitely charming Beaucaire bowed his acknowledgments. It was rather a change from the one-side part at the other theatre.

It was an intoxicating draught the audience held out to him, and he drank deep of it. This was Acknowledgment indeed. This was Fame! It was Life, delicious, inspiring. Shaking with excitement, he sloughed his brilliant popinjay attire, and walked out into a changed world.

Mrs. Bignett could not understand him. He was gay and débonair, dancing her astounded little body clear across the kitchen, and bowing his beautiful Beaucaire bow, while a stream of the delightful broken English mingled with French scraps in his mock apology. As a terrible climax, which filled the little woman with incredulous delight, and the sister with hoarse mirth, he picked his landlady up and deliberately kissed her. Then he fled, laughing.

"My Gawdfather!" the sister exclaimed, admiringly, "wisht it'd bin me! He's a peach of a man."

With anticipatory delight he opened his paper next morning. "E" had been sent out for one. To read an account of himself as leading man would be a sensation.

#### CHARITY MATINEE.

#### "MONSIEUR BEAUCAIRE" AT THEATRE ROYAL.

" . . . . and last, but not least, the State Governor and Lady McGill were present. Her Excellency wore (twenty lines of frocking and society news). The play presented was the rather banal 'Beaucaire,' in which Mr. P. Lee played the name part, supported by capable amateurs. It is believed the Hospital will benefit to the extent of at least £600."

How damnable! Of course there was no advertising to pay for a proper critique. Still—

Ten minutes later, a dapper little man in a top-hat knocked at the door of No. 231, and was brought upstairs by a gratified Mrs. Bignett, who vaguely connected top-hats with religion. She felt that her adored Mr. Lee deserved such a caller.

"A gen'leman to see you, sir," she said. That "sir" was a concession no ordinary Australian could have wrung from her democratic bosom.

Philip took the card from her grimy fingers.

"MR. JOHN DERBY," it read, and the address was the Theatre Royal.

"I represent Masters and Edwards' crowd, Mr. Lee," he began, in a pleasantly flippant voice, which confided to Philip by implication that it was a queer crowd to represent, but one must understand that a living had to be got somehow.

"Suppose I come to the point without skirmishing. We like your Beaucaire. We need a good fellow for Romantic Comedy—young—er"—he twinkled just the

least bit—"able to make up as passably good-looking—you know the sort of thing. We're sick of putting a wig and paint on an old chap of fifty and asking the crowd to be good to him and kid him they're taken in. We're putting on 'The Musketeers,' 'Beaucaire,' 'School for Thingummy'—all that rubbish. The public like it. If you're not tied to the other crowd—we thought—p'raps you'd give a squint at this contract."

The "squint" revealed a contract for twelve months, at a salary of ten pounds—grossly unfair, shockingly underpaid for the work—but still—a contract, a recognition of ability.

"I'll sign it," said Philip eagerly, and Derby wished they'd put a six, instead of the ten. The fellow was a booby.

"Good business. I always know a business man when I see one. No fooling about. Knows his own mind. Here you are." He held out a fountain pen.

"How long notice have you to give your crowd?" he asked.

"I'll stay till they have a man to put in my place," Philip declared.

"Well, buck 'em up. We start rehearsals in Melbourne three weeks from to-day. By the way, where were you born?"

"Australia."

"Bad luck. But you came from England here, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Sall right. We'll bill you as the famous English Romantic Comedy Actor, direct from the Duke of York Theatre."

"But I've never been inside——," began Philip.

"S pity. But you must often have passed there. Well, I'm off. Ta-ta. Get rid of those people at once, and come and see me when you're fixed."

He nodded a gay adieu, and left behind him a man who believed that at twenty-five he had tasted the best the world can offer. Perhaps he had.

## CHAPTER XI

*"The Pope may launch his Interdict,  
The Union its decree,  
But the bubble is blown and the bubble is pricked  
By Us and such as We.  
Remember the battle and stand aside  
While Thrones and Powers confess  
That King over all the children of pride  
Is the Press—the Press—the Press!"*

—THE PRESS

A YEAR'S Articles had qualified Peter to practice his profession. A very lean year it had been, owing to the ridiculous requirements of the regulations, that during its currency an article clerk must devote himself to his unpaid job, and refrain from such unimportant details as making a living.

Polly's egg-money found sad drains on it, supplemented by such other sums as Jim could spare.

However, it ended, and in a drab court, on the motion of a fledgling barrister, his own contemporary, he was admitted to practice as a barrister and solicitor of the Supreme Court of Victoria.

Being thus licensed to shoulder the burdens of the worried public, it was disappointing that not a single member of the harassed masses showed the slightest disposition to avail himself of the help Peter was prepared to render. He religiously attended his tiny office, took his seat daily at a painfully shiny table, sorted his clean blotting-paper, tried his half-dozen new pens in the glass ink-well, and—waited. Sometimes he wandered up to the Law Courts and listened to the dreary cases going on. On such occasions he put up an unnecessary card which announced to an indifferent world that he would be "back at two."

Conscientiously he would return, but no queue system was required to marshal the waiting throng. This hungry period synchronized with that in which Philip's story was cast on the waters.

Then Chance befriended him. In Chancery Lane, a hurrying individual ran into him, and cursed him bitterly.

"Why, if it isn't Mr. O'Dwyer!" exclaimed Peter.

O'Dwyer stared, and invited the Almighty to bless his soul if it wasn't Peter Wister.

"And, for Heaven's sake, call me Mickey, Peter. Forget I'm a condemned schoolmaster," adding immediately, "do you actually have your being in this infernal Petticoat Lane of swindlers?"

They were ten paces off Peter's office. O'Dwyer responded with alacrity to Peter's timid invitation. They entered.

The master's quick eye took in the newness, the indecent freshness of it all; he noted the tidy, unused table.

"And how long have you been welshing the public, my dear chap?" he inquired.

"I've been qualified to do it for three months," Peter informed him, "but so far they've been content to wait."

"Cowardly brutes," Mickey commented. "In the meantime, does the history of the canine companion of the recently deceased Mrs. Hubbard have any message for you at all?"

"The poor dog has none," smiled Peter, without bitterness.

"There are other cupboards, my friend," suggested the visitor.

"All locked, Mr. O'Dwyer."

"Mickey, Peter, confound your thick-headedness."

"I said they were all locked—Mickey," repeated Peter, obediently.

"H'm!" A long reflective pause.

"I wonder if I've got a key. Do you happen to know that in taking on this legal game you're bucking heavily against one of my aged prophecies?"

Peter looked puzzled.

"You're probably the worst lawyer in Melbourne, at the present moment, and I'm aware of the full significance of the accusation," Mickey continued. "But there's one thing about the law you'd be infernally good at."

"I'd be glad to know it, then," said Peter.

"A witness," Mickey told him, impressively. "My funny friend, are you aware that you are a born observer? That you have a gift of getting to the—er—pardon me, the guts—of a thing? Now, unfortunately, you have no opening as a professional witness, so where do we find ourselves?"

"In the cart, apparently," Peter replied, without hesitation.

"Have you ever heard of newspapers, dear boy?" inquired Mickey, whose discursive style was a curse to his cronies. He would only come to the point in his own time and method, and one had to give him his head.

"I've seen them," replied Peter, falling into his mood.

"Now we've cleared the ground. Newspapers," didactically, in the authentic manner of the schoolmaster, his forefinger pointed accusingly at Peter—"newspapers do not write themselves. They are written, or oftener stolen, by men like me and you. I, even I who speak to you, as the French say, occasionally indite of a good matter, and lift current coin of the realm therefor. My lucubrations are printed in the daily press, and by those simple means gain absolute credence for their opinions from men who would not believe me *in propria persona*, on oath. Print, Peter, is a wonderful thing. Please say you are astonished."

"I really am astonished," said Peter.

"And impressed," dictated Mickey.

"Undoubtedly impressed," he agreed.

"Well, why should not you, in the intervals of dealing with the enormous financial and legal interests of your clients, go and do likewise?"

"As how?" Peter begged for enlightenment.

"Men chiefly love to read what themselves have noted but lack words to express," Mickey said, glibly. "A cabman dissatisfied with his fare and saying so in good Australian is a more interesting figure to the tired business man than Ulysses and all his adventures. Did you know that?"

"Only of myself," said Peter; "I suppose it is true."

"Newspapers pay for things that possess an element of human interest. Will you remember that phrase? Hang on to it. Human interest! Go to! 'Easy Lessons in Practical Journalism,' by Mickey O'D. Write me an article on any ordinary topic—let me see. A suburban bread-winner running for the 8.8—a solicitor waiting for clients like a fat spider in a web, and they come not, though he has been required to liquidate his overdraft—anything, so long as the man in the street will recognize the type and its eternal truth."

"But I can't write," objected Peter.

"If you could, my dear old ass, I wouldn't be advising you to take to journalism. You could be making a fortune writing mining prospectuses. Go and get your hair cut—it wants it—and come back here and write what you see and hear. Make a human interest story. Then bring it to me. I've got diggings somewhere—let's see."

He fished for a card in unlikely waters, with an earnestness that made it seem that the existence of the diggings depended on his landing the card. Finally he succeeded, and handed it to Peter.

"There. Now let me go. I don't want to interfere with a busy man's appointments."

With a pleasant smile to temper the gibe, and a final reminder of that human interest he insisted on, he gained the grimy corridor, and made off for the sunlight of the street.

Such is the power of suggestion that Peter went ten minutes afterwards to have his hair cut. He put up a card, "Back in half an hour." If a stray client got away from Peter, it would not be the latter's fault.

The article made a half-column in the evening paper



that O'Dwyer recommended. The gentleman, chuckling and delighted, shoved it across to the editor, Ingram, a splendid young fellow, who had attained his journalistic majority at an age when his contemporaries were still cubbing.

Ingram read it. An editor is never visibly impressed by anything. He put it down.

"The chap's been to my barber," he said, and he gave a sudden laugh. "It's Burke to a T."

"The beauty of it is, my clever young friend, that he's been to everybody's barber. The boy's captured the type. He's cut away all the excrescences, and shown us the essential barber—the qualities without which no barber can—er—barb."

"Mickey, you've made a find," approved the editor; "send him to see me."

Peter was never to know the joy that comes of listening to a client's woes, when the client is going to pay for the luxury of confidence. He closed his office, sold his shiny table, but kept his pens and blotting-paper. He had found himself. Every Tuesday night, the Man in the Street, who is also the Man in the Train, in the Tram, in the Office, in the Home, chuckled over an article which dissected his neighbor's idiosyncrasies. Never his own, you will note. Idiosyncrasies are what other people exhibit. You are always the perfect norm, with maybe one or two specially lovable little ways.

He changed his diggings, for some nearer his work. Ingram promised to find a vacancy on the staff, and in the meantime fed him with odd scraps—descriptive articles, human interest stories, and always his angle of vision was the angle of his friend the Man in the Street, but more acute, more observing—more kindly.

He had been in this milieu about two months when Philip arrived in Sydney. They entered into eager correspondence, and he was kept up-to-date in all his friend's affairs, with the exception of the Mazie interlude.

One day he was delighted to receive a wire telling

of the projected visit to Melbourne. He hurried down to Mrs. Chuff, his landlady.

"I say, Ma," he appealed. "I want you to keep a room for a friend of mine, an actor. He'll be here in three weeks."

Mrs. Chuff beamed.

"A Nacter!" she echoed. "'Struttin' 'is little hour on th' stige.' O' course we'll fix 'im up, dearie, Mar'll see to that. He'd be a fairly young one, I s'pose!" she asked, almost as if she were referring to poultry offered to her culinary skill.

"My age," said Peter.

"Oh, a chicking," she commented, "righto, my bird. 'E shall 'ave the best the 'ouse affords. I can't say fairer, can I? 'Warder, O, let the port colors drop,'" she concluded.

Mrs. Chuff had a vague idea that this line betokened a welcome. What the port colors were she could not have told you. Her fat face wreathed itself in delighted smiles, and her chins all shook, rippling up to her neck. Then the threatened laugh came gustily, wheezily, shaking her bulk and ending, as it always did, in a fit of coughing, during the spasms of which she continued to smile, her red, congested eyes narrowed to slits by the exertion, but promising more mirth when the trouble should have passed.

Mrs. Chuff was delighted. She had for many years been a theatrical dresser, following for twenty years the fortunes of an actress to whom she always referred as "Miss 'Arrington."

Miss 'Arrington remained for her a type of all that was good, and clever. Through her, all actresses were to be defended from aspersions. Night after night she had stood in the wings, watching with adoring eyes, and it was in this way she had picked up her odd scraps of dialogue from plays and poems, for Miss 'Arrington had recited often for charity. With these she garnished her conversation, never failing to pay herself the tribute of a wheezy laugh, for she perfectly understood her own limitations, and knew that ignorance of the printed word

and imperfect hearing of the spoken, often cast grave doubts on the accuracy of her rendering. But the rhythms always remained, and she would often "la-de," or "tum-tum" the missing syllables.

Her husband was still stage-doorkeeper at the Princess Theater, where Philip was to appear. He lived in a little box, surrounded by letters and keys. He had a manner that forbade approach on weekdays, a strictly official manner, that thawed to a mellow affability on Sundays.

"We're both in the perfesh," Mrs. Chuff used to say. "on'y o' course I'm funder in than Chuff."

They suited each other perfectly and found endless interest in "shop" talk, that dated back to palmy days and great names. She kept her theatrical title of "Ma," always alluding to herself under that intimate appellation. Every boarder, such was her winning way, dropped into the habit by the second day. In return she called everyone "dearie," "pet," "my bird," or "my jewel," and other mechanical endearing names. Boarders, men and women, walked into her kitchen, and helped her to "dish-up," even carrying their own plates, when ready, into the adjoining dining-room. Polly approved of her, and she of Polly; her love for Peter, who often helped her with the washing-up, while she told him stories of her artistic career, was so strong that she was with difficulty prevailed on to take his weekly money. The boarding-house was bought with a legacy from her beloved Miss 'Arrington.

The Houses of Parliament were hard by, majestically closing the broad vista of Bourke Street with noble Grecian portico, at the head of a broad, lofty flight of steps, and a couple of members of Parliament—honorary members, Mrs. Chuff called them—occupied balcony rooms in the house. The rest were actors or commercial "gents," who thought they were living in Bohemia. And then there was—Margaret.

Margaret was a joy. She fell heir to the wealth of affection Miss 'Arrington left behind her. She was the daughter of a deceased Attorney-General of the Common-

wealth, a fact which filled Ma with a sense of intense gratification. Her one remaining relative, an Aunt, was "in Serciety," and frequently drove up to the house in a broosh with a coachman on the box who wore "a cocky in 'is 'at." Mrs. Chuff used to watch this official through the drawing-room window what time his mistress was within. Curiously enough, he appeared to Ma far grander than Margaret's Aunt. Recollections of "My Lord, the carriage waits," invested the equipage with an aristocratic air that enveloped the whole house for a full hour after it had driven away.

Margaret possessed a hundred a year of her own, and limitless hopes and ambitions. Exquisite miniatures on ivory testified to a solid basis of talent, and in her room, which she furnished and decorated with her own money, she lived happily and independently, seeing and entertaining her friends there, and gathering round her a little coterie of men and women, young, enthusiastic, clever, all of them "doing" something.

Her room was directly over Peter's. He was there a week before he saw her, owing to his irregular hours. One evening, he was leaning his elbows on his window-sill, head and shoulders thrust far out, trying to take advantage of a tiny cool breeze that had sprung up at the end of a hot summer day. He was enjoying the moist, earthy smell from the wet lawns of the park that closed the street.

Something that clung, something long, something clammily wet, something black—suddenly fell on the back of his neck, and dangled dripping ends over his shoulders. He clutched at it. It was a woman's silk stocking.

Simultaneously he heard a stifled exclamation above. It might have been dismay; it might have been mirth. He looked up. It was mirth. Two merry eyes were enjoying the disgraceful episode, while an apologetic mouth was framing suitable regrets. Peter grinned cheerfully, and broke his Laocoon pose.

"I'm so sorry," the girl said, with an adorable demureness. "It slipped. I—I was just going to hang

it out, when I caught sight of you. I was frightened at—I dropped it.”

Peter found that gazing upwards at a vision was tiring work.

“I’ll bring it up,” he called.

A minute later he was opposite her door; she stood in the opening, frankly laughing, a wholesome big-hearted laugh that had not a suggestion of a giggle about it. Peter was grateful for this. Girls who giggled made him see red.

“I’m a born retriever,” he said, and passed the stocking.

“Good dog,” she replied, approvingly. Peter felt as though he had been patted. Through the door he got a flashing glimpse of the room. He expected a replica of his own. Dainty chintzes instead, box-curtains of some exquisite stuff at the windows! So much his unintentional glance had revealed. He looked resolutely away, concentrating his attention on the girl.

There was a tiny pause. The incident called for nothing further. To force a conversation on her would be taking advantage of the situation. But what a girl!

With a stilted little bow, that bore evidence to his lack of minor graces, he turned, with reluctant feet. She, on the contrary, was coerced by no grundyisms. She liked this shy youth at the first glance.

“I’m Margaret Gillies,” she said, with a charming directness. “Would you like Ma Chuff to introduce us, or shall we go it alone?”

He smiled in a friendly fashion, and turned back. The boyishness of her conquered his shyness.

“We might risk it,” he said. “I’m Peter Wister.”

“Not *the* Peter Wister?” she asked, gravely.

“No,” he rejoined; “just Peter Wister.”

“Do you know Alastair Carr?” she inquired.

“Rather. Do you? He was at Queen’s with me.” He was delighted to know they had a friend in common. It put their acquaintance on a footing at once.

“Then you are *the* Peter Wister. Alastair said you had genius.”

"What on earth for?" he asked, blankly.

"Friendship," she told him.

"Oh—silly idiot—I mean Carr," he explained, hastily. Then he astonished himself by a speech that was positively courtly for him.

"If I have any small talent, I'd like the opportunity to develop it—with you," he risked, and flushed with his presumption, a moment after.

"You shall," she promised. "Are you permanent?" she asked.

"A——?"

"I don't mean in friendship," she broke into a laugh.

"Oh, here?" He suddenly caught her drift. "Oh, yes, I'm one of Ma's boys. I expect to die here. That is, if I can keep on paying for the room. And you?"

"Behold!" She moved aside, and the glory of the transformed room revealed itself. The bed was cunningly screened off. A large sitting-room was the effect produced.

"My word!" he whispered, in astonishment. "Are you a millionaire?"

"Not in cash. But I am in happiness. I have simply unlimited funds to draw on, for my friends as well as myself. Notice the prevailing hue?"

"Blue," judged Peter.

"Right. A nice sense of color you have." She approved him with her eyes. "Blue! For happiness! Nobody must be unhappy here. They may come unhappy, but they must never go unhappy. That's one of the rules of the establishment."

"Ripping idea," he agreed. He would have agreed with anything she said, the radiant creature!

"'No. 1, Contentment Road' is the address," she said, with a grave, sweet smile. "Make a note of it, Mr. Wister."

"I have," he assured her. "What's Contentment Road?"

"My life track. I'm humping my bluey along it, all on my own, but it's going to lead me on a very jolly

existence. I've made up my mind to it. This is No. 1, but if circumstances evict me, I'll just move on to No. 2, but it'll be on the same old road."

"You're an optimist," he accused her.

"We all are, if we'd only admit it," she retorted. "A pessimist is only a superstitious ass who's afraid to let the jealous gods know he's still hoping."

"Don't you fear that Life is sometimes waiting round the corner—er—with a—a bludgeon?" he asked, anxious to come to the heart of her philosophy.

"There are no corners in Contentment Road," she said, serenely, with all her delicious innocence and ignorance in her dancing eyes, and she put a shapely arm against the lintel, and leaned her cheek against it, as she challenged his reply.

"Doesn't that make it rather dull?" he wanted to know.

"You get a straight view," she said, merrily, "and with all the wonderful things in the landscape, how can anyone be dull?"

"I like to see my road straight, too," Peter said. "May I come up sometimes to No. 1 Contentment Road?"

"My working hours are nine to twelve," she replied, "and I sleep from eleven till eight. Otherwise the door is always on the latch. For emergencies, I'll break into either work or sleep."

"But if I make a nuisance of myself? I might come too often," he suggested, thrilling at the thought of the unlatched gate into the garden of Contentment.

"I have a cure for that, too," she smiled, "but it's a secret remedy. And now, I must wash that other stocking. They're my best. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Peter, awkwardly. She was preparing to shut the door, and her dimpling sweetness looked out at him through the aperture, with just a hint of impudence.

"I'm so glad you've got big, broad shoulders," she said.

"Why?" he challenged her.

"My stocking might have missed you, if you'd been a weed," she explained, and the door clicked.

"Now what on earth did she mean by that?" thought the slow Peter, and descended reluctantly but happily to his room.

Human interest was claiming a revenge.



## CHAPTER XII

*"It's like a book, I think, this bloomin' world,  
Which you can read and care for just so long,  
But presently you feel that you will die  
Unless you get the page you're readin' done,  
An' turn another—likely not so good;  
But what you're after is to turn 'em all."*

—SESTINA OF THE TRAMP-ROYAL

**I**T was high festival in Peter's calendar the day Philip arrived.

Mrs. Chuff was glad to get him out of the house.

"Worse'n a nold 'en with one chicking," she told him, and she surreptitiously put the kitchen clock on a full half-hour.

"You'll never get down in time, me lord, if you don't buck up," she cried, in well-acted panic.

"Keep us some grub; he's sure to be hungry," he shouted to her, and fled.

He had nearly an hour to wait on the Spencer Street platform, for the Sydney Express was running half an hour late.

"Good business! Good business!" was all the eloquence he could muster, as for at least half a minute he wrung Philip's hand.

"Dear old chap," the latter said, affectionately. "Jove, it's good to see your ugly old mug again. How long is it—two years? Half a tick, till I get my luggage through, and then I'm your man."

New, virgin valises, with a glittering initial L on each, as befitted an important actor, were piled into a cab, together with a battered, disreputable, leering old trunk. They clattered up Collins Street. Philip looked about him with interest.

"You've got to travel to appreciate all this," he said,

with an eye on the breadth of the road. "Great old place. I'm awfully glad to be back, Peter."

"You're a great man, Phil. You'll never be satisfied with Melbourne for long. You'll soon go kiting off somewhere else."

"Here, give us a chance," the "great man" protested. "I've just arrived, and here you start looking up Bradshaw for outward bound traffic."

"Not me. How's the wonderful play getting along?"

"Which one? The written or the spoken? I'm writing a corker, old son. I believe I'll develop into a ruddy little playwright. Oscar Wilde could never make words sparkle as I can. Epigrams just come and eat out of my hand."

"Are you giving up the stage, then? I thought that was where Fame was coming from."

"Oh, I'll give it a run. I said I wouldn't give it up, till I'd shown those manager chappies a thing or two, among other things that an Australian can act. After that, well—we'll see."

"So you're an Australian," Peter interjected; "that's good business." "Good business" was the inarticulate Peter's superlative.

"You bet I am. You've got to be an exile to make you a good patriot. I find they can do most things in this funny old place just as well as the chaps on the other side of the water. Hullol this the place?"

Mrs. Chuff was waiting for them, at the head of the long flight of steps that led from the street, beaming warmly, like a fat sun, her head nodding a violent welcome. She hung over the iron rail and yelled to the cabman.

"George," she directed, "bring along them things to No. 10. It's on the second floor."

The dazed cabman, whose name was Albert, obeyed, wondering why he did. Philip's generous overpayment perhaps was a deciding factor.

At the top of the steps, Ma met them.

"This is Ma," introduced Peter. Philip smiled.

"If I put all the good things I've heard about

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Mrs. Chuff into a book," he said, "it would be as big as Webster's Dictionary."

"Now, that's spoke like a prince," declared the elated lady. "I must tell that to Chuff." She led the way indoors, the two following in her rear, like two supply ships in the wake of a warship.

Come on down an' heat yer dinner while it's 'ot. Mr. Wister'll show you yer room after. It's next 'is, the fussy ole thing."

"Ma!" reproached Peter.

"Lor! 'E will 'ave me call 'im Peter," she explained, "but it don't sound right before strangers, some'ow."

"Give me till to-morrow, Mrs. Chuff, and I'll defy you to call me a stranger," remarked Philip.

A vague whisper out of the past reached the lady's consciousness.

"'Oo goest there? A stranger, lord, from la-de-de-de-de,'" she quoted, hazily, with a smile that lent her extract some point. "You an' me'll be friends, all right. You'll 'ave to call me 'Ma' like the rest of 'em. Down 'ere, an' mind th' broken lino. It's tripped me up an' 'undred times, but I allays fergit to 'ave the dratted thing mended. It's dark, an' a bit narrer. The 'ouse wasn't built to my measure, not by no manner o' means." She wheezed and laughed at her own patter as she heavily lowered herself from stair to stair to the dining-room.

After the meal, Peter found that the traveler had gone out. Ma explained that he had gone to the theater to see if there were any "call."

"A neart-breaker, that lad," she continued. "Lord, don't I know the signs! 'E'll 'ave arf the women of Melbourne buyin' 'is pitcher. An' Ma Chuff'll be one o' th' fust, bless 'im," she concluded, emphatically.

"He's one of the finest chaps in the world," Peter informed her. "You wait till you know him better."

"Ho, I'm willin' to take 'm without ref'rences, dearie. 'E'll do me. Sentimental ole fool, I am. Well, what I allays ses is, sentiment makes the world go round'. A kiss is better'n a kick be'ind, any day in the week.

An' fer all me fat, Ma's 'ad 'er share of the kisses, pet, an' charnce it."

"I'll bet you have," Peter agreed, "and if I wasn't a fathead, I'd risk Chuff and give you one."

"You wicked little devil! Where do you learn all this? If you go 'intin' things like that, I'll 'ave to tell Marg'ret."

Peter flushed scarlet, after his manner, and Mrs. Chuff, who knew no reticences, laughed till she coughed.

"Bless the boy, can't I mention 'er name, without you turnin' all colors? 'Ere, if you're goin' to loaf in my kitchen, jest beat up them eggs there, be your elber."

The bell rang. Mrs. Chuff sighed.

"'Silence that dretful bell,'" she quoted, with surprising aptness. "'An' Annie a-cleanin' herself. Poor ole Ma! Them stairs'll be the death o' me. W'y can't people learn to come roun' to the side door?'"

"I'll go up," offered Peter. "I'll say I'm the butler." "Hif you sed you was a hangel, there'd be folks believe it. Go on, dearie. If it's the gas, the money's in a screw o' paper inside the meter-box. Bless me, it's more like to be Mr. Lee. Silly ole fool, I clean fergot to give 'im a latchkey."

It was Philip, excited, talkative, bursting with surpressed information.

"I've seen her, Peter—actually in the flesh, and not fifty yards from this very house," he cried.

"Seen who?" asked Peter, ungrammatically.

"Her—the authentic, only Girl, you ass. The Girl I've been waiting for," Philip said, impatiently.

"Well, if you waited for her, of course you saw her," said Peter. "What's her name?"

"How in blazes should I know? I don't go up to a strange girl in the street and say, 'Excuse me, but I've got a blithering friend who'll be sure to ask me your name. What is it?'"

"Why wait for a girl whose name you don't even know?" asked the "blithering friend."

"I didn't wait for her, confound you."

"You said you did. And if so, you might speak. Why not tell her that she's—what was it?—the Authentic Girl? She might like to know, to tell her people." Peter had a gift of quiet satire, when he chose.

"Shut your sarcastic head," invited Philip, "and listen to me. I must find out who she is. She got off my tram, just where I did. She must live near."

"Why didn't you follow her?"

"Don't be more of an ass than you can help. Follow her! She went up to that pillar-box on the corner and posted a letter."

"Well, that ends it, unless you go and camp by the box till she posts another. It may be a habit."

"You're an unsympathetic beggar. I've been waiting for this girl for years, Peter. Look here, old son, grin if you like, sneer if you must, but by hookey! I'm going to marry that girl."

"Unless she's married already—or engaged," amended the practical Peter.

"Good Lord! I never thought of that." Philip was dashed for a moment. "No, she can't be. A girl couldn't be made for me, and then snapped up by another fellow. There must be some system in the world."

"There is," agreed Peter; "but mightn't the other fellow come into it? There's the bare possibility you weren't made for her, old chap."

"You're a poor-spirited, gloomy flathead, Wister. I'm going to marry her, I tell you."

"If you find her," Philip finished.

"Oh, I'll find her fast enough," was the confident reply.

"What was she like?" asked Peter. They were by this time in Phil's room. Peter sat on the bed, while his friend shoved ties, sox, and collars indiscriminately into drawers.

"Like? Have you ever seen sweetness and serenity, strength and intelligence, fun and daring incarnated in a body whose beauty——"

"Help!" from Peter. "No more, Phil. It's simple

as A.B.C. Advertise. Advertise for a lady last seen getting off a tram in Gisborne Street, East Melbourne, accompanied by sweetness and—er—serenity, strength and——”

Philip stifled the rest with a pillow, and what followed was a riot. They forgot the years between, and became schoolboy spirits.

Then they brushed their untidy hair with Phil's brushes. Peter looked at his watch.

“You and your girls!” he said, with scorn. “Come with me and I'll show you a girl.” He opened the door.

“Where are you off to?” Phil wished to know.

Peter surprised him. Peter had developed amazingly.

“Contentment Road,” he answered. “Come on. She'll be back by now. We've just time, before she begins to dress for dinner.”

Philip followed Peter upstairs, and, after the necessary permission had been given, into the blue daintiness of Margaret's room.

“This is Philip, Margaret,” he said.

But Philip was wordless. He stared, with his heart in his eyes, at the girl—the Authentic Girl. It was some seconds before he remembered his manners.

“Lee is the rest of it, in case you're interested. Peter would never think of a little thing like that, Miss——”

“He wouldn't,” agreed Margaret; “and Gillies is the rest of it, Mr. Lee, in case you're interested.”

That was their meeting.

“You'll have to excuse Phil, Margaret,” Peter explained. “He's just seen the girl he's——”

“Shut up, you ass. Miss Gillies, don't you find Peter is rather a blatant sort of person at times?”

“He needs squashing,” she affirmed. “He talks too much. I like a quieter person myself.”

“You'll like me, then,” he told her. “I seldom speak.”

“Don't you find that go against you in your profession? You're an actor, aren't you?” she asked demurely. “Or does the high price per word your

salary represents limit the vocabulary for private consumption?"

"I see Peter has mentioned me," he inferred.

"If you call it 'mention,' when he has told me the most intimate facts of your life, infancy, middle- and old-age. He may have left out a childish ailment or two, but I know of the pony, the scholarship, oh, an' ev'rything."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Philip, in consternation. Then: "He brought me up, Miss Gillies, and you must pardon the exaggerated idea a parent has of the interest of bored third parties."

"Oh, I made all allowance, Mr. Lee. Peter grows lyric so seldom that when he does he lends a fictitious interest even to a commonplace subject."

Vaguely she resented the sureness in his manner; faintly she sensed a patronage of Peter, and her words carried a tiny point. She may have been right, but the first person to be horrified at the idea that he had always unconsciously accepted Peter's admiration as a right, would have been Philip. His affection for his chum was beyond all cavil or doubt. He leaned on his strength, in fact. Was it possible that there was an unspoken, almost unthought ghost of an idea in his mind that the prop of a great man is rather distinguished by the opportunity thus afforded for service?

She carried it lightly, however, and, sensitive as he was to ridicule or blame, he only saw playful bandinage in her gibe.

Peter's eyes, as he watched them fence, held nothing but whole-hearted admiration for both. He and Margaret had become great friends. He had not the least idea, as yet, that the world for him was a fragrant, desirable place, just because it held this wonderful personality. In a vague way he felt that somehow or other he must manage to walk in her friendly company down Contentment Road, ready equally for service or effacement, whichever would pleasure her. Further than that he did not look.

And now he was glowing with pride at exhibiting

his two paragons to each other. Philip would be a welcome third in their arrangements.

"We must be there for the First Night," he broke in; "will you be nervous, old chap?" he wished to know.

"As a kitten," Phil confessed. "In fact, I'm not sure that I want you to come, Peter—nor Miss Gillies. I think I'd feel better without friends."

"There are two sides to that, Mr. Lee," Margaret argued, with a bright smile. "We might make you nervous, but if we brought Ma and the rest, what a formidable 'claque' we would form! I'm not sure the management wouldn't give us free seats. 'Applause was deafening and continuous during the whole of Mr. Lee's great speeches,' she quoted from an imaginary newspaper, 'especially from one portion of the gallery.' Still, I suppose we couldn't cheer right through the speeches. It would show great affection for you, but little appreciation of the great Dumas."

"You decide me," laughed Philip. "You must certainly be there, and I shall strain my ears for the applause from one portion of the gallery."

"It's a bargain, then," she promised. "What are you going to be—D'Artagnan?"

"Yes."

"Oh—I love him," she cried; "but why do they cut out his yellow horse? Please have a yellow horse, Mr. Lee."

"No. D'Artagnan must swagger. A hero on a yellow horse! It may be life, but it isn't Romance," objected Philip.

"How dare you say that! Life is Romance she insisted. "Isn't it, Peter?"

"With you it would be," replied that amazing personage, Mr. Wister, and straightway turned a beautiful pink, that ran slowly from his neck to his temples. It was folly, but he never knew lately when he would utter some such absurdity; hardly knew he had done it, till it was out, thundering on the air, echoing horribly for what seemed hours.

"Now that's very pretty of you, Peter," she thanked



him, with a warm smile. "You are coming on splendidly."

This was a new Peter to his friend, who looked at him with curiosity. The remark was not Peterish at all. Who had been teaching him this readiness of speech? Was it possible——?

"You've broken out in a new place, old chap," he said.

"And a very pleasant place, too," commended Margaret. "You musn't tease him, when I've had such trouble to get him out of his old ways. For a long time he never said a nice thing to me, but now he's human. He suffers normally from a disease I call Wisteria."

"Wisteria!" Phil repeated, with an interrogative lift in his voice. Peter smiled, and told them to "drop it, and give a fellow a chance."

"Not the flower," she explained. "Wisteria is a complaint recently discovered by an eminent pathologist. Its symptoms are a chronic desire to avoid human company, a nervous irritability at being forced to be merry and bright, and a disinclination to pay pretty compliments to people who are suffering such deprivation. We have discovered that Wisteria is curable, haven't we, Peter?"

"You'll end by making me so forward, I'll have to be slapped," he grinned.

"Never while you say nice things like you did just now," she promised. "What a digression from Mr. Lee's affairs! When do you open? I never look at the papers."

"Not for a fortnight."

"Oh, goody. In that case, I'm going to ask you and Peter to come in and meet some friends of mine. I wondered if you'd have a free night."

"Any night." With flattering promptness he assigned his liberty.

"All right. I'll let you know. Hope you won't be bored. We all talk about our own work, but we don't

listen to each other, because we're busy thinking out the next remark we'll make about our masterpieces when the horrible bore opposite stops talking about his own drivel. Does the prospect attract you?"

"Enormously. You see, I don't have to think out bits. My own ego is so handy, that I can appear to take an interest in the other chap, while a clever remark is all ready-made to pop out, when his babble ceases."

"In this case, the 'other chap' may be a girl."

"The principle holds. Nothing takes my real mind off my own concerns. It's quite simple."

"You're writing a play, aren't you?"

"Yes. Peter again, I suppose. I wish he'd have a relapse into that Wisteria of his."

"You don't mean that. Perhaps I'm boring you in talking about your work?" She twinkled gravely. He smiled.

"Don't be nasty," he begged. "I'm happiest when I am talking about myself."

"Are you—is it—strictly private, or do you ever take counsel?" she asked.

"I take counsel, when counsel promises not to be bored, or to think me a conceited ass," he said. "But I want real criticism."

"I know. I've met lots of artists. They all ask for real criticism. Once I gave it. He never comes to see me now. You see, if your criticism is favorable, it is real, it is honest; but if it hurts, it's unintelligent flap-doodle. I know. The only person I really hate is a once dear friend of mine, who thought I ought to be designing jam-tins, instead of painting miniatures. Now I'm going to promise you that I won't criticise you."

"You *are* an understanding person," said Philip, admiringly.

Peter broke into sudden laughter.

"You're a witch, Margaret. Advice is a thing that fellow will never take, unless it agrees with his own determination."

"What a horrid, natural, human person you're turning out," she smiled.

"Don't believe him, Miss Gillies. I wander from pillar to post in the most aimless fashion, simply because I have such a passion for advice that I am always wobbling."

He was an impressive, lovable personality, as he leaned forward in his chair, his eyes young, and alight with eagerness, his whole being on tip-toe. He reminded Margaret, fantastically enough, of a bird poised for flight.

"Are you going to be a great actor, Mr. Lee?" she asked him, curiously.

"There's nothing I want so much in the world," he told her, with emphasis.

"And when he is at the top," jeered Peter, "he'll look about, like Alexander, for fresh worlds to conquer."

"What a jumpy sort of career," Margaret commented. "Contentment Road will not be your address, Mr. Lee."

"Contentment Road? Peter mentioned that."

"Our address—Peter's and mine," she explained, and Peter's heart missed a beat with the sudden delight of hearing himself linked with her plans. "Oh, a most humdrum place, which would bore a great man to tears. You're to be a very famous personage, living in—where shall we say?—'Hurryon Avenue.' Will the next world you will conquer be the kingdom where the Dramatist reigns?"

"There is a newer ambition, which I will give pride of place," he said, daringly, but there was nothing to give her a cue to his meaning.

"Something I have just discovered to be infinitely preferable. Till I get that I'll postpone all other conquests."

"It sounds intriguing," she admitted; "and what happens to the conquered territory when you marshal all the king's horses and all the king's men, and ride off on a new quest? Is it reduced utterly, and left to languish in poverty and ashes?"

"It is forgotten, I suppose," he acknowledged. "A man has to make progress."

"Perhaps the destruction marks the progress," she suggested.

"There is no destruction," he told her. "Abandonment, if you like. You couldn't expect a fellow to stagnate in a rut, when he might lift himself out, and pick a better road? It is neck-or-nothing with me. I fight till I win."

"You always did that Phil. At college you were noted for it." Peter could always be trusted to remember anything that would embellish a record.

"You spoke of marshaling the king's horses and the king's men. Did you mean anything by that?" asked Philip.

"You mean—Humpty-Dumpty?" she inquired. He nodded.

"Not the least hint," she protested; "but I do think—this is terrible cheek of me——" She paused.

"Not a bit—go on," he urged.

"Well, I think the fate of Humpty might follow—how shall I put it?—say, too much diffused effort. Can you afford to succeed in one thing and then calmly jettison it, and take up another? Isn't it rather unfair to the props by which you rise?"

"Why on earth should it be? The stage doesn't shut up shop, if I decide to leave it. It's the fight that interests me. I'm willing to leave the prize to the mercenaries. I fight to win, and in the winning I get all Life has to offer.

"You fight and ride away. It almost sounds like loving and riding away. I don't like it, somehow, Mr. Lee. I mean as a philosophy of life. Nothing personal. To keep you nice and normal, one ought to pray that you never make a big success."

"But not to succeed would be tragedy. Surely failure in life is unpardonable," he argued.

"It depends," she said. "Some kinds of success are dire failures. Isn't there a tragedy in the wrong kind of success?"

"Now you're getting ethical," he said, and got up. "My argument deals with life as it is, not as it should be." Peter rose, too, pleased at the mutual interest these two took in each other. That the talk had passed

from light flippancy to earnestness had made him feel specially delighted. Margaret was best, when she passed beneath the surface of things. Philip shook hands, as he stood by the open door.

"We'll have some more talk, please," he begged, "and I'll promise to pick up the pieces of the things I destroy on the mad march to victory."

"If they're not pieces of Humpty himself," she said, with a gravity that made her sweetness maturer, almost maternal.

## CHAPTER XIII

*"The Queen was in her chamber, and she was middling old,  
Her petticoat was satin, and her stomacher was gold.  
Backwards and forwards and sideways did she pass,  
Making up her mind to face the cruel looking-glass,  
The cruel looking-glass that will never show a lass  
As comely or as kindly or as young as what she was."*

—THE LOOKING-GLASS

MRS. LEE had found the middle period of life extremely pleasant. In a tiny flat, which an infantile prodigy of a servant managed with ease, and her mistress along with it, she found that her income sufficed her needs.

She had the most indefinite ideas of current affairs. Only Column One, Page One of the conservative newspaper she took in interested her. It contained the sole news that is really important to anyone—births, deaths, and marriages. At fifty-odd, one outgrows enthusiasms; she no longer dramatized herself. It is a sport that loses its fascination, when the only part left is that of a super.

Her friends were elderly ladies, who had watched events with a growing conviction that things were not as they used to be, tea and toasted muffins excepted.

Her religion was a tepid affair. God was a gentleman. To say that was to say all. He was very unlikely to act towards her in a manner inconsistent with the best usages. She attended an Anglican Church, whose clergyman, an English Public School man, thoroughly coincided in her views about the Almighty. She fed him periodically with weak tea and toast, and chatted with him on the more social aspects of Heaven. In return he told her mild stories of his more unregenerate days, and glowed with pleasure when she "tut-tutted."

In Philip's home-coming she tried to rejoice. But after the first pride of showing him off had worn away, she was vaguely conscious of an intrusive note in her existence.

To-day he was to bring a friend, a girl, a Miss—what was the name? It was on the tip of her tongue. Names were so diff—oh, yes, Gilfillan. No, that wasn't it. She had known some Gilfillans somewhere—where was it? On the Continent, she thought. The Continent! What a good time she had had on the Continent, before that horrible woman—she wondered whether Lady Lee was still alive, and what had become of that boy of hers. After all it was curious that Philip had heard nothing of them when he was at Eton. Eton! Had it been a mistake to send him there, after all? But his father would have it. He was a headstrong man, always. He would never listen to her about stud sheep—

She mused characteristically, her mind tangentially darting off to a new topic suggested by the last.

And this girl! Surely it was not her place to pay the first call! She should have waited till Mrs. Lee had taken the first step. It was all part of the looseness of these Colonial ways. They had not been brought up properly. Who was she after all? She had never heard of any Gilruths, had she? Or hadn't she? Weren't those people at Bournemouth named Gilruth? Horrid people. Perhaps this girl was a daughter? No, that wasn't the name—Gilray, no—Gildea. After all, it didn't matter; but she wished they'd come and get it over. Was Philip engaged to her? He was far too young, just a boy. But he was quite a famous person. Even Mr. Bright, the clergyman, had talked about his acting. In a guarded way, of course, not enough to commit the Church.

Philip's ring disturbed her meditations. She looked through the asparagus screen that filtered the hot sunlight into the room.

Good Heavens! A carriage! And an old lady; well, not old, perhaps, but surely Philip was not engaged to her! Oh, no. There was a girl. H'm! Very pretty,

no doubt, but too self-possessed. A little nervousness would be more becoming.

Gertrude, the prodigy, inserted her meagre body, tying on a clean apron, and speaking with a bit in her teeth, in the shape of a long pin that was going to transfix her cap when she'd got them dratted strings tied proper.

She made explanatory noises, and her bit dropped out and metallically "pinged" on the polished floor.

"Lor'm! It's a kerridge!" she was at last understood to announce. "I seen it fr'm the bathroom."

The bell pealed again.

"Keep yer 'air on! I'm comin' fast as ever I can," muttered the young lady, giving a vicious dig to her cap with the recaptured pin. Then she darted out to open the door.

Mrs. Redfern, the sister of the deceased Attorney-General, with pennons fluttering from expensive hat and ample waist, and carrying a full cargo in the shape of a Pom, was majestically warped into port, and moored to a chair, previously taking a salute from her hostess, who hadn't the least idea who she was. Then came the girl, and after her Philip, dynamic, breezy, ebullient. Gertrude, the small tug, cast off from Mrs. Redfern, and steamed into some dock of her own, in the kitchen.

Philip came to the rescue.

"This is Mrs. Redfern, Mater, and this is Miss Gillies."

(So it did have a Gil in it; she knew it.)

"Ut's a tr-r-emendous pleasur-r-e for-r-me to meet you, Mrs. Lee," said Mrs. Redfern, whose Scotch voice, losing nothing of its native charm, had a soft purr in it, like smooth, well-oiled machinery, all on one note. When she stopped speaking, it was like a machine running down. "We ar-r-e all such admir-r-ers of you-r-wonder-r-ful boy. Such a success! You must be pr-r-oud of him."

"Oh, thank you, thank you," said Mrs. Lee, wondering if Gertrude was using the best China tea. "Of course it was a great disappointment to us, I mean to me. It would have been to his father if he had lived.



Not that I dislike plays, far from it. When I was a girl at school we used to do French plays, very different from the things they do now, and I remember going to 'The Second Mrs. Tanqueray,' in London, and liking it; not that women like that interest me, only you must hear both sides after all. London theatres are educating in a way, though I suppose education is not everything. I remember my husband was a great believer——"

Mrs. Lee might have got from Philip's success to the state of morals in Kamchatka, if the tea and Gertrude had not simultaneously switched her thoughts. She whispered rapidly to the handmaid, evidently a question about the China tea, for that damsel answered brightly.

"I dunno. It was the yellow stuff in the small caddy on the lef' 'and side o' the mantelpiece." She put down the tray, and turned to Philip.

"I seen you th' other night, Mist' Lee. You was being Dartygan. Me an' another young lady was in the front row of th' gall'ry. We waved to you. See us?"

"That will do, Gertrude," said her mistress.

"I must have missed you, Gertrude," said Philip. "Wave harder next time."

"My word, I will. There's more 'ot water on the gas-stove, an' will you be wantin' more scones? 'Cos the baker's there now, an' it's arf 'oliday to-morrer."

"He'll have gone, if you don't hurry, Gertrude," Mrs. Lee said, in an agony.

"Not 'im. 'E always stops for a bit of a chin. I wouldn't arf tell 'im of, if 'e went. Well, two loaves, I s'pose."

"Yes. I'll ring if I want you, Gertrude."

"The bell's broke. But I'll 'ear you, if you call. We'll only be in the yard." She vanished, with a comprehensive smile that bade them all kindly welcome to come again. Margaret laughed joyously.

"What a treasure, Mrs. Lee!" she said. "I envy you. Auntie will be slipping out to bribe her away from you."

"Entirely savage," explained Mrs. Lee, busy with the tea-pot. "But Australian servants are terrible. Do

you remember Bertha, Philip? No; you wouldn't be likely to. It was before you were born. Strong or weak, Mrs. er—Renfrew?"

"Str-r-ong, Ah-pr-r-ef-er-r-ut," whirred the visitor.

"I've just got a dim recollection, Mater," Philip said.

"I don't think so, dear," his mother gently insisted. "But memory is a funny thing. Weak or strong, Miss Gilmore?" Philip looked in a resigned way at Margaret, who plumped for weak tea.

"Yes, it's funny. We had a gardener once—do you care for gardening, Miss Gilruth?" The story of the gardener was still-born.

"Gillies, Mater," corrected Philip.

"Why don't you listen, darling?" she asked, without bitterness. "Gillies, I said," she concluded, firmly. "And sugar and milk!" without a change of voice.

"Both, please. I adore it, Mrs. Lee; but in a city boarding-house one gets so few opportunities," Margaret began, taking up the thread she could catch.

"Why, haven't the stores plenty?" her hostess asked, vaguely.

"Oh, I was talking of gardening. Aunt Bessie," her explanatory look at Mrs. Redfern turned Mrs. Lee's gaze politely towards that excellent bit of stopped machinery, "Aunt Bessie has a glorious garden, and now and then her gardeners allow her to have a tiny posy out of it. Otherwise they're very strict."

"How nice!" Mrs. Lee rejoined, vaguely. Philip was busy with the cups and muffins. As he handed the plate to Margaret, that vulgar person deliberately winked at him. His preternatural solemnity, which was his only buckler against disgrace, failed him. He bubbled into a laugh, which Margaret covered.

"Have you seen Mr. Lee act?" she asked.

"Not yet," replied his mother. "It's the swords. I can't endure fighting. One day they'll cut themselves, and the authorities will step in. It was the same all my life. I've got to look away when they fight duels, and they're always doing it in this play. I've read the book. I'm reading such a charming book now, Miss

Gil-Gillies," and she let a severe look rest just a moment on Philip, to mark her achievement. "I wonder if you've read it. It's by—I forget his name; but this man—the man he's writing about, don't you know—but you probably know the story better than I, and don't you think it's pathetic where she tells him it can never be? And—oh, Philip, *such* a funny thing, talking of books!" She broke off her theme, with gentle animation. "That Dr. Payne, who used to live in Deniliquin, and whom your dear father never could bear, and I know he attended him once for some complaint or other, bronchitis, I think, or if it wasn't, it was gout—no, it was influenza, because I remember it was the time three cows died of the same thing," she said, in a triumphant burst of inconsequent memory. "That was the man."

"Well, what about him, Mater?" asked Philip, firmly leading her back to the track.

"I'm just telling you, dear," she reproached him. "He's living next door. He's bought a practice."

"Payne!" echoed Philip. "By Jove! that's news. Peter will be as pleased as Punch. A splendid chap," he turned to Margaret. "You'll like him. He's your sort."

The machine began with a preliminary click.

"I wonder is he r-heumatism? I'm simply a mar-tyr-r to r-r-heumatism, Mrs. Lee," said Mrs. Redfern.

"How very peculiar," replied Mrs. Lee, with the first look of real interest she had exhibited. "So am I. Do you get funny little crawling pains in your knees?"

"Like spiders biting inside the skin, and itching on the outside!" inquired Mrs. Redfern, breathlessly.

"Yes," corroborated Philip's mother, in a gentle shout.

"Ay—do I," said the 'mar-r-tyr-r,' feelingly, and abruptly hitched her chair nearer. She had come to call on a stranger, and behold, by the alchemy of a common enthusiasm, a sister! And some people wonder why God sends trouble!

"They've clicked," whispered Philip, delightedly. Margaret handed him her empty cup.

"Don't interrupt them," she signaled, in answer to his offer of replenishment. "I'd go thirsty as a camel to give Auntie the pure pleasure she's enjoying. Your mother is a darling, Mr. Lee."

"You can't continue to call the beloved son of a darling mother 'Mr. Lee,' surely?"

"But I've only known you a month," she argued.

"In this incarnation," he amended.

"Hearsay evidence is not admissible," she reminded him. "Let's stick to things we're sure of. I can't go Christian-naming all the sons of Creation, however beloved—by their mothers," she made hasty ending.

"Of course not. And so I'll only expect you to do it in this one instance," he begged. "We really have come to a dead end on 'Miss' and 'Mr.' And you did it to Peter."

"Oh, Peter's different. Peter's a man and a brother," she explained.

"I'm so satisfied to be a man that I don't in the least wish to be a brother," he said, in a low tone. "But I do want you to call me Philip."

"It's a bargain," she agreed.

"It's an instalment of the principal," he substituted.

"I owe you none," she retorted. "I'm not even sure about the interest. Anyway, don't talk about instalments. I'll never be ready for the payment."

"Some day I'll draw a check on your bank of happiness, and you will have to pay it," he risked, seeing that the others were absorbed.

"It will be returned marked 'No Account,' and you will look silly."

"Why do you say things like that to me?" he inquired.

"Surely I can bank there as well as others?"

"You're a spendthrift creature who will always be overdrawn, and the bank tries to protect itself against such customers." She smiled, but her eyes were grave. She was just beginning to realize that she must protect herself against the charm which threatened to destroy her common sense. She had weighed Philip when she could do it dispassionately, and she had decided that

she might easily fall in love with him, but that the experiment would be risky. His temperament was not suited to Contentment Road. Yet, if he pleaded——”

“I might give security,” he suggested.

“Be satisfied, Philip,” she said, seriously. “You and Peter are just infants, and I won’t stand any precocity. Behave yourself, and don’t spoil your tremendous projects with impedimenta. We’ll have to be off. Listen.” She held up a forefinger for silence. “Auntie’s rheumatism is now shooting for wet weather. Unless your mama can outdo that, the séance is nearing its end. How happy they are, the dear things!”

“No happier than I,” protested Philip. “It was angelic of you to come this afternoon. I want you to know all my friends and ——”

“Not relatives. Don’t say it,” she begged. “I couldn’t bear it. Fair’s fair. I’ve swapped my aunt for your mother. We’re square.”

“I have no more,” he comforted her, “that is, except in England.”

“They don’t count,” she said.

The absorbing discussion was near an end. Mrs. Lee came out of a trance of happiness. With a warmth that almost approached effusiveness, she begged her guest to let her see more of her. Her voice almost promised the most luscious symptoms for a future meeting.

“A charming woman, that Mrs. Renfrew,” she confided to Philip, when he returned for a forgotten parasol. “How funny her rheumatism should be the same as mine.”

“The finger of God, Mater,” said Philip, solemnly.

As they came out, a small, neat motor-car drove up, and shoved its smelly bonnet almost under the fastidious noses of the horses.

“There’s Dr. Payne now!” exclaimed Philip, adding, in a low voice, “I say, Margaret, do let me introduce him; I may never have so good a chance.”

“The rheumatism man?” inquired Aunt Bessie. She had already endowed the doctor with this ailment, and no alien specialty of Nose and Throat, of Ear and Eye,

would ever displace the line she had willed upon him. "Dr. Payne, you know, the gr-r-eat r-rheumatism man," she would tell her friends, when speaking of him.

Payne, hale, hearty, clean-shaven, looking very little older than he did twenty years before, jumped briskly from the car, but wheeled sharply as his name was called. He had the alert, purposeful air of the man who does things. He looked blankly at Philip.

"Don't you know me, Dr. Payne?" said the latter. "You ought to. I'm one of your babies."

"Lord, Lord, you're Philip Lee. My housekeeper kisses your photograph before she goes to sleep."

"Very nice of her," grinned Philip. "My mater just told me you were in practice here. Peter Wister will start chasing his tail when I tell him."

"Peter! Peter's coming out here to dine to-night. I rang him up to-day. I've only just settled in, you see. You'd better join us. Dunno what we'll have."

"I'd like to, but I've got to be at the theatre at 7.30," explained Philip.

"Well, we dine at six, so you'll manage all right," the older man said, heartily. "Lord, it makes me feel old to see you youngsters growing up. And so you're the famous actor! Married?" He shot a glance at the carriage.

"No, but—come here a minute." He led him to the curb.

Margaret had watched with interest the man who had had the vision for Peter, and had transformed it into reality. She took instant liking to his rugged, straightforward face, with its gray crown of thick hair, showing beneath the felt hat. She fell in love with his jolly laugh. She shook hands warmly, and Payne glanced with admiration, every whit as keen, at her.

"Dr. Payne," she said, with a directness that was one of her greatest graces, "I'm going to claim you for a friend right away. We're fellow artists."

"Fellow artists?" he queried, with a smile.

"Yes. You made Peter Wister over from a farm-hand into a very fine, natural gentleman. I'm putting

a few decorative touches on your work—useless, but ornamental. Peter and I are sworn comrades. Doesn't that give me the right to skip all preliminaries of acquaintance?"

"It certainly does, Miss Gillies. I'll judge your handiwork to-night. But don't say I made Peter. He made himself. I gave him the initial idea. He was always fine, but I gave him an environment more suited to him than Jim Wister's farm."

"Come and see his environment," she invited. "We live humbly, but Buckingham Palace isn't in it with us for happiness."

"I'll come with the greatest pleasure," he told her.

"You mustn't neglect your r-rheumatic practice, Doctor," Mrs. Redfern warned him, with massive archness.

"You must have been talking with my bank manager, Mrs. Redfern," he said. "How else could you know it was a rheumatic practice?"

"Oh, I knew," she triumphed.

"Well, I'll stay, and go right into the theatre from here," Philip said. Margaret nodded gaily, and threw a charming smile at the doctor. Then the outraged horses were backed out of the radius of petrol stench, and merrily clicked on their way.

"Who is that splendid girl?" Payne asked. "Where did Peter come across her?"

"She's a gift from the High Gods, Dr. Payne," replied Philip, "and if luck holds, I'm going to marry her."

"Ho-ho!" cried the doctor. "Is it even so? Engaged, are we?"

"Not yet, but she's going to marry me. She's the Authentic Girl, you see."

"Does she know it?" inquired Payne.

"Not yet, but I think she's beginning just to have a dawning of a suspicion," said Philip. "You see I never wanted anything so much."

A shaft of memory shot across Payne's mind.

"So you're mad on a thing till you get it," he had once mused about Philip.

One thing he felt savagely sure of—that girl with the steadfast eyes deserved steadfastness in return. Would she get it? he wondered.



## CHAPTER XIV.

*"All the talk we have ever heard  
Uttered by bat or beast or bird—  
Hide or fin or scale or feather—  
Jabber it quickly and all together!  
Excellent! Wonderful! Once again!  
Now we are talking just like men."*

—ROAD-SONG OF THE BANDAR-LOG

NUMBER ONE, Contentment Road, was *en fête*. It was Philip's last Sunday in Melbourne, and Margaret had packed her big room with friends who "did" things, to say farewell to the great man.

In a way, she felt his departure as a relief. It would give her a much-needed breathing-space. He was rushing her, and it was wearying work to be continually on the defensive. The party was, in a measure, a breastwork against his attacks.

Payne, by now on the footing of a friend, was one of the guests. He had been monopolized by Roxy Barrow, who, in her direct, ruthless style, had carried him off to a quiet corner. She wrote the Woman's Letter for a weekly, in which, with friendly, understanding malice, she held up to ridicule the foibles exhibited by her sex during the previous seven days. Her stout, ungainly figure securely penned the doctor into his corner, where he soon grew resigned, and then interested, as her racy, slangy talk ran on.

"You're a new one, aren't you, doctor?" she asked, with a quizzical look.

"Brand new," he informed her.

"And how do you qualify?" she continued. "What do you do? I mean outside your ordinary contribution to the vital statistics, of course."

"I understood the only qualification in this room was—er—serenity," he rejoined.

"In a way," she admitted. "A disposition to let things rip, I suppose. But Margaret has a *flair* for avoiding the banal. I thought you might have a line. Not verse, I hope?"

"Lord, no!" He was quick at repudiating the suggestion. "I'm just a friend of the management. I dress the room, give it that solid appearance which even the froth of frivolity of people like you can't entirely hide."

"You'll do," she approved. "I asked because people who 'do' things are so bored if others don't know their *forte*, don't you know. A good talker is a person who quickly discovers another's weakness and then plays upon it."

"Then I must ask yours," he retorted. "Please tell me all about yourself."

"My dear man, you know not what you ask," she warned him. "I'm a cat, professionally speaking, of course. I creep round, and listen at doors to overhear what my sister-woman is doing, and if it's sufficiently interesting, that is to say, sufficiently scandalous, I just flirt with the law of libel, and publish it the following week. Please say you think it's a noble pastime."

"You are libeling yourself," he accused her. "You look too good-natured for your job."

"That's my fat. The Editor advertised for a fat woman. You see, we are never suspected of being deliberately nasty. It makes the few apologies we are compelled to make go down better. But *avoiirdupois* has its disadvantages. My Editor is a mean man. And I am a lazy woman, and thereby hangs a tale."

Payne settled himself back comfortably. He was enjoying the twinkling, gray eyes that saw Life as a huge jest for a weekly causerie.

"You have my attention," he smiled.

"It is a pathetic story," she explained, "but short. One week, after I had driven the poor man crazy by being almost, but not quite, too late for press, I actually

missed the bus. He didn't consider the relief of twenty poor women who expected to find themselves in my pillory, and obtained miraculous reprieve. Oh, no. But, in place of my usual piffle, he put an announcement, in pica, to the effect that readers might take note of his contributor's lapse, and, if it happened again, he would publish her exact weight. Wasn't that a shameful revenge?"

"And did he ever have to?" inquired Payne.

"You'd better believe I gave him no chance," she retorted. "I sit up at night till the darned thing is finished."

She turned her head. Philip was speaking in a low tone to Margaret, who shook her head decidedly, and moved away to another guest.

"There's some copy for me," she said.

"Lee and Miss Gillies?" he inquired.

"Um. Think there's anything in it? The women of this little village have lost their heads about the fascinating Philip. They tell me he is writing a masterpiece of a play. Perhaps he's going a-gunning for a heroine."

"They are very good friends, Miss Barrow," he said, "and I think it ends there."

"And you also think Roxy Barrow is an interfering, prying, stout party, who would be better occupied minding her own business," she completed, good-humoredly.

Margaret came over.

"Roxy, you always monopolize people. I want Dr. Payne, and I want you to go and be nice to Mr. McNab. He's shy."

Roxy made a face, and raised her bulk reluctantly.

"If you insist," she said, "but Dr. Payne was just telling me what an impossible creature he thought me, and I was enjoying the experience." Then she sat down again. "McNab can just be brought to the mountain," she said, firmly. "You can't move me like a chessman."

Payne arose, and McNab was inserted with some difficulty into his place. He was a short, thick-set young man, with a flat, expressionless face, and untidy red hair.

He wore a loose-fitting sack suit, with short coat-sleeves, from which protruded red wrists that terminated in huge hands, the backs of which were covered with coarse, red hair. Two years later his was to be an international reputation, and his water-colors, which now sold for a few guineas, were to be competed for by experts.

Roxy struck the right note immediately. McNab was voluble on one subject only, the future of Australian Art, in which he saw possibilities that Australians themselves did not even dimly guess at. Launched on this topic, which she had wit enough to make controversial, his common face glowed with feeling and was transfigured. His hands, which were an uncontrollable nuisance to him, except when the brush was in his fingers, ceased their clumsy movements, and gestured explanatorily.

"We're building a school out here," he told her. "The days are passing when picture buyers insist on English or foreign names. I tell you they are beginning to realize what an inspiration our environment is. An English artist told me the other day that he had come out here to paint, but could find nothing to do."

"He wanted cathedrals, I suppose," said Roxy. "Did you leave any of the pieces to send home to his friends?"

"He wasn't worth bothering about. Nothing to paint! Our bush was too monotonous—no color; our sky was too brilliant, too much color. Fatuous ass! I told him to go and look at Heyson's trees, at Streeton's water, at Brown's skies, and then come back and argue. You just wait a year or two, and then take a squint at the exhibitions in London. You'll find Australian canvases everywhere. We're just coming into our own."

His excited, enthusiastic voice laid down the artistic law, and the awkward, shambling, common vesture of flesh that hid the fine creature beneath seemed to be sloughed off. It was the voice of Australian ambition articulate.

Peter had constituted himself a depository of the yearnings of a girl with a mission. She was working for

the day when Repertory plays would be the ordinary pabulum of the play-going masses.

"They say it doesn't pay," she said, indignantly. "Pay! Who wants it to pay? This commercializing of the drama would be its ruin, if there were not the shouting voices of Galsworthy and Shaw reminding us that there are champions still fighting."

Peter began a faint protest, designed to keep a roof over the heads of the awful, commercial managers, who, after all, had to live, but the argument was snatched from him and ruthlessly trampled on.

"If they won't give the public what it really wants, they don't deserve to live," she announced, firmly. "Why don't they go and sell tea and sugar, in a frankly commercial way? How dare they occupy the places of men who should use their responsibilities towards the education of the people properly? Stupid rubbish like comic opera and revues is ruining the public taste. When have we had a good play?" she demanded, and paused for a reply.

Peter quailed. He knew that if he described any play as good, it would certainly be denounced, together with his taste. Still she was dreadfully in earnest; she even appeared angry with him. He risked it.

"Well, don't you think Dumas is—er—all right?"

With a gesture she swept Dumas and the whole romantic school out of existence.

"Can't you see that it is only life that can educate?" she asked, superbly. "And if that is so, it is only realism that can really be given a place on our stage. Who wants glittering pretense, when he can suffer with a glorious creature like the washer-woman in the Silver Box? when he can live through the poignancy of Hedda Gabler or of Nora?"

"But it's ugly," said Peter, bravely.

"And isn't Life ugly?" demanded the young lady, who had had just twenty years' experience of it.

"No, not at all," declared Peter, suddenly daring. "And, if it were, what a splendid argument for not multiplying its brutality by playing at it, as well as

living it! If you're right, what people need is not horrible stuff like Ibsen, but sweet, make-believe Romance, where lovers marry and live happily ever after."

The girl with a mission was too hurt to resume the argument.

"You're just like the commercial managers who only think of the box-office," she condemned him, and moved away.

"You tell your friends to go to the hospitals and the morgues," he fired after her. "Mine, who are only after amusement, will continue to go to theatres."

"Who's that girl with the bobbed hair?" he asked Margaret.

"She's Connie Young. She used to belong to the Manchester Repertory Theatre. Isn't she interesting?"

"She suffers from it," said Peter. "I believe she hates me. I admitted I liked romantic plays."

"Poor Peter!" laughed Margaret. "She is very earnest. After all, it is only the extremists who reform the world."

"Has it ever struck you the world doesn't like being reformed?" he asked. "It's a beastly process. The world's all right, quite a jolly old place, if they'd only leave it alone."

Philip had been captured by another reformer. He was a Labor Member of Parliament, one of Mrs. Chuff's "honorary" members, a fellow-boarder.

A Labor Government was ruling the country, and it must be admitted, ruling it with an efficiency as great, at least, as its Liberal predecessors. A crop of tremendously keen, intelligent, glib young men had sprung up, under the forcing of political party success. Anything less than the caricatures of Labor men, with bowyangs and red bandannas, and a dinner-pail, could not well be imagined. Their speech was sometimes rough, but oftener cultured. The general high level of education effected that. Their policy, which in Opposition had been extremist in tone, had in the mellow warmth of office thawed to geniality; they no longer wanted to make a bonfire of vested interests; the tumbrils no

longer yawned for hated capitalists, and a guillotine might have stood in front of Parliament House for a generation, without any evil passions of the Government supporters being moved to cry for a victim.

Henry Avery was a type of the new people's champions. He was a pleasant-looking fellow, an intellectual, and he suffered only from an itch to make converts. He saw material in Philip.

The latter smiled, as the member made his opening gambit. He shook his head.

"I'm afraid I must admit I don't take the least interest in politics," he said.

"That's a damaging admission," said Avery. "Doesn't it strike you as curious that men like you, keenly interested in every phase of social life, dependent for your living on the changes in social life, should nevertheless be indifferent to the security of the hook, from which the whole thing hangs?"

"I suppose it would, to you," admitted Philip. "But I take the security for granted, with chaps like you screwing the thing into the beam."

"That's all very well," countered Avery; "but you mustn't mind my saying that it's just that damned *laissez-faire* that brings about bad government. You're not a labor man, I suppose?"

"I don't suppose I am," he admitted. "Of course, I think the working-man should get a fair deal, and all that kind of thing——"

"So long as it doesn't interfere with your life," smiled the Member. "I oughtn't to argue this way, because it is precisely through the apathy of your class that our people are in power. If only the great mass of middle-class opinion became vocal, and expressed itself at the ballot-box, labor would have to wait another generation."

"What are you actually after?" Philip asked, his interest enlisted.

"Do you mean ultimately? Or at once?" inquired Avery.

"Well, I suppose I mean ultimately," explained the other.

"Absolute equality of opportunity—absolute equality of effort—absolute equality of payment," the Labor Member replied, instantly, as one repeats a lesson.

"But—that's tosh," Philip criticised. "I mean—how can you have equality of effort? Peter will loaf, while Paul works. That's human nature."

"At present. But is human nature a static quality? Doesn't it change with changing conditions? Wasn't it human nature in the great artistic age that came in with the Renaissance for a man to wish to be associated with the building of a great cathedral, with the achievement of some painfully slow form of Art, the benefit of which only the next generation would obtain? Surely there was a time when the acquirement of wealth was not human nature. Well, may not there come a time when the payment of money may pass away, and with its abolition the nature of man to acquire and hoard become only like a tale that is told?"

"But that will be the millennium," laughed Philip.

"I said—ultimately. We don't expect to pass a Bill this session, you know," smiled Avery. "We've got something like an equality of opportunity at present, with our great system of education and scholarships. Yet a hundred years ago, human nature would have had to be changed to grant even such a commonplace measure of reform."

Philip's plastic mind suddenly saw a vision of a changed world, himself one of the agents. It would have been quite possible for him to have dramatized himself once more, as a political leader this time, suffering martyrdom to bring Utopia into being. He glowed.

The spell was broken by Margaret, under direction from Peter.

"If you don't yank Phil out of that fellow's clutches, he'll be standing for Parliament next election," he warned. "He's just about the point where he sees himself on the stump, promising a millennium when he's Prime Minister."



"Good Heavens! He takes as much looking after as a child," she moaned, and removed him from the danger zone.

Supper was a solvent of the situation. Serious talk became gradually more and more detached, and replies were delayed, as chairs were removed to one side to give passage to Mrs. Chuff, who, with Chuff as assistant, had undertaken to wait on the guests.

When Margaret had consulted her about the arrangements, she had been a tower of strength.

"You jest leave it all to Ma, dearie. 'The funril baked meat'll coldly furbish up the married stables,' which I mean to say that the turkey we 'ave 'ot for dinner'll cut up cold for supper. Then Chuff'll serve the wine. 'E's the chap to make it pop, an' I allays thinks the pop makes things go, some'ow."

She came in now, all smiles. Most of the guests she knew by sight. Chuff followed her, with the wine, solemn and important. He was a spare little man, a Cockney, with a sallow, thin face, and alert eyes, which swiveled, from habit as a Cerberus, no doubt, from the shelter of gray turrets of eyebrows, raking the approaches to his cubby. He wore a white tie, which transformed his shabby suit into evening-wear. On his feet were carpet-slippers, the heels of which were leveled with the ground, and displayed to the public gaze the much-darned gray socks he habitually wore.

Chuff, whom his work rendered severe, looked at the men, as he handed them things, as though he were continually on the point of asking them their business. But this professional frost melted when Philip insisted on his taking a glass of wine. A nod from Margaret had suggested this concession.

"If *you* please, sir," said Mr. Chuff, with becoming humility, and in a miraculous instant, it was gone. Philip almost wondered whether he had not by an oversight failed to give it to him after all. The empty glass, in Chuff's hand, was proof, however. Perhaps there was just the tiniest suggestion in the doorkeeper's manner that he would not be averse to another. He

obtained it, and treated it very differently. It was as though he had flushed the way, in order that the second glass might make a solemn entry, without interruptions *en route*.

Margaret was talking to Mrs. Chuff, who shook her head less and less decidedly, until at last she laughed a big, shaking laugh and surrendered.

"Oh, well, dearie, if you 'ave a book, I'll 'ave a go at it, but you'll 'ave to prompt somethin' crool."

"Mrs. Chuff's going to do the Balcony Scene for us," Margaret announced, "and she doesn't mind how much you laugh, because she says it's as funny as a circus."

On a heroic chair, behind the piano, Mrs. Chuff clambered, with squeaks of apprehension. Margaret stood near, with the book, and when the actress faltered, she prompted her. Philip created a diversion by coming in unexpectedly as Romeo, pressing up to the foot of the piano, with adoring eyes fixed on Juliet.

"Wot's in a nime? that wot we call a rose

By any other nime would smell all right

So would Romeo, were 'e not Romeo called

Retain that tum-ti-tum-ti which 'e owes."

Mrs. Chuff would never pause for correction in the middle of a line, but, with charming good-humor, and wreathed smiles, she would tum-ti till she caught up the end of the rhythm. But memory soon lagged, and the voice of the prompter was increasingly heard in the land. And then Juliet, weak with laughing, said:

"You finish it, dearie, now you're so fur on. A funny, fat ole Juliet I am. But 'sfunny, w'en I say that piece, 'tain't meself I 'ear, it's my Miss 'Arrington, an' it soun's lovely. Go on, pet, finish it."

Which Margaret did, in a sweet voice, with just a tiny tremor in it, when Philip took up Romeo's part, and made realistic love.

"Alack, there lies more peril in thine eye

Than twenty of their swords; look thou but sweet

And I am proof against their enmity."

Roxy Barrow made quite a nice paragraph out of it in her next Woman's Letter.

When it was over, Chuff grew reminiscent, the wine having warmed him into good-fellowship. The Labor Member touched the chord of memory by mentioning Henry Irving, *père*.

"'Enery Irvin'!" Chuff roared the name in an impressive, defiant way. "'Ere, I'll tell you a story of 'Enery Irvin'—an' it 'asn't got into th' papers, either."

Chuff had a way of setting his stage, grouping his characters, placing his furniture, training his spotlight, and then letting you down horribly by dropping the curtain.

"'Enery Irvin'. Talks o' 'Enery Irvin'!" He slapped his leg in an agony of mirth, and roared: "Lor lumme! I could tell you some yarns 'bout 'im, that'd make you die with larfin'. I were doorkeeper at the ole 'Aymarket, w'en Irvin' was doin' 'The Bells.' 'Ere, I'll show you."

With eager hand, he pulled a chair towards him.

"'Ere's the cubby-ole"—he pulled another in front. "'Ere's me sittin', as it might be, jest 'ere." He eyed the stage with a managerial eye. "No, 'ere," and he corrected his reckoning by a foot. "'Ere's the letter-rack, jest on me right; the key-'ooks is over 'ere on me lef', an' Ma's the door. It was a Toosdy—no, it wasn't neither, it was a Monday—no, I was right at fust, 'cos I had a toothache, an' 'ad it out; it was Toosdy—an' in comes 'Enery, jest by Ma. 'E warn't Sir 'Enery then, not be a jugful; 'e got that later fer actin' before th' ole Queen in this very play, 'The Bells.' 'E fumbles with 'is eye-glass a minute, an' looks up at the letter-rack, 'ere. 'E looks at the rack, 'e did, an' then 'e looks at me. 'Chuff,' 'e ses, sharp-like, but gentlemanly—lumme, I kin 'ear 'im now, gentle-like, but sharp, an' yet not sharp neither, but soft—*gentle*, that's wot it were—'Chuff,' 'e ses, 'wot the devil do you do with my letters, eat 'em?' 'e ses. Lor lumme! Larf! I nigh killed meself. 'You're a caution, Mr. Irvin', 'I ses. 'E let you say wot you liked. 'Wot the devil do you do with my letters?' 'e ses. 'Eat 'em?' Eat 'em!" He chuckled uproariously. "Lord, 'e was smart. Al-

ways sayin' funny things. Well, it was a bad day for England w'en 'e died. Well, ladies and gents, me an' Ma'll be leavin' you to enjoy yourselves. Good-night, one an' all."

With which comprehensive farewell, he collected the proud Mrs. Chuff, on whom shone a reflected glory from the great dead, and departed to lower regions.

It was the signal for departure. The girl with the mission, McNab, once more with his overcoat of Commonplace, Roxy Barrow, pretending to be at daggers drawn with Dr. Payne, the Doctor himself, all filed out, the Member exacting a promise from Philip to come to the House on his return from Sydney.

Only Peter, Philip and Margaret were left.

"Was it nice, boys?" she asked.

"Ripping," said Peter. "Absolutely bonzer people."  
"Would have been better without people at all," said Philip, gloomily. "My train goes at five, and I'll not have a minute for a talk."

"Five minutes more to make Phil in a fit frame of mind, so that Rule One isn't broken, and then, like dear old Pepys—to bed," commanded Margaret.

## CHAPTER XV.

*"One man in a thousand, Solomon says,  
Will stick more close than a brother.  
And it's worth while seeking him half your days  
If you find him before the other.  
Nine hundred and ninety-nine depend  
On what the world sees in you,  
But the Thousandth Man will stand your friend  
With the whole round world agin you."*

—THE THOUSANDTH MAN

**N**EXT day Philip left for Sydney, for a three months' season. He had been refused twice by Margaret.

He took it hardly. His personality suffered almost an eclipse. He grew silent, with an occasional storm of irritability succeeded by a condition of as extravagant abjectness.

His moods alternated, at one time high with hope, at another fathoms deep in dejection. His physical health, generally so abounding, suffered. With him the mind always ruled the body.

Margaret found her own feelings hard to analyze. Her normal, level, common sense told her that Philip, brilliant, good-tempered, generous as he was, yet possessed a certain instability that made her fear for him. That old impression he had given her on their first meeting—that he was like an eager bird, poised for flight, never left her. It attracted her tremendously, on her woman's side; it stirred something in her that sprang to meet the boyish, flaming spirit in him. In this mood she could have surrendered. But it passed. A chill, little wind of caution blew over her desire. Her mind, free from emotional influence, was able to sense a danger.

She hated, too, the nomadic, restless life of the stage.

She saw herself, in clear moments, an object of one emotion among many others—the feigned emotions which Philip's profession forced upon him. The facile passions of the actor, changing with changing parts, are apt to render his nature very elastic. Elasticity loses its quality by being overstrained. When resilience has departed from Love, the latter becomes a commonplace, dead thing. Where passion is habitually a pose, true emotion is in danger.

His resolution flamed higher than ever, despite his rejection. It enveloped him; possessed him to the exclusion of everything. His play lay, three-quarters finished, forgotten, or, if remembered in intervals, despised. His work grew mechanical, for his mind was always fixed on Margaret. He must win her; he would win her. He told Peter of his refusal; of his resolution. Peter, with a queer little pain at his heart, told him it was inconceivable that Margaret did not love him; that he must just wait quietly until she realized herself.

But quiet waiting was not in Philip's power. He soared, limitless, to the greatest heights, so long as he could have Margaret as an inspiration always beside him. The boastful motto of the great Fouquet might well have been assumed by him—“*Quo non ascendam?*”

He told her this, in a tremendous effort to carry her by storm, in the approved way.

“If you'd only marry me,” he said, “there is nothing I could not do.”

“But, surely, Philip, ambition in a man should not depend on a thing like that.”

“Perhaps not. I'm not talking ethics.”

“You're successful now, if success were all I wanted,” she argued.

“Oh—that!” he scorned. “That's nothing—piffing. I mean—big things. You don't want to marry an actor.”

“I don't want to marry any sort of successful man, if it comes to that, merely because he is successful,” she said. “If I loved you, it wouldn't matter if you were a clerk at thirty shillings a week.”

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"Well, it's no good talking—now," he replied; "but I'll never take 'no' for an answer. As soon as I've saved enough money to give me a free year, I'm going to chuck the stage. Then I'll finish my play, and show you what I'm capable of."

"But you were so set on reaching the top of the tree in your profession," she remonstrated.

"Can't you see how it is?" he burst out. "That would take me farther from you. What am I now? A tenth-rate star, but still, these people in Melbourne have given me all the sensations even the big fellows get, except money. When you've heard a theatre booming with noise, and realize it's for you, you've heard just exactly what the years can bring you. The sound of Australian hand-clapping and banging boots won't be a bit different from the same things elsewhere, whether it's Africa, England or America. Girls will write just the same dam-fool notes; the papers will write similar tosh. It's all the same monotonous grind—and I would be treading the dreary road without you. I couldn't ask you to trail around with a wretched mummer."

"But, Philip, you must not throw it over just for that reason. It is trying to force my hand, and I won't be forced. It's not fair, and I resent it."

"I'm not forcing it. As I am I can't win you. Well, I'll make myself over into something that can win you. You can't stop me. I'm—I'm sick to death of the posturing and grimacing, the love-making and the make-believe of the stage. I can't stick it much longer. I'm going to realize on it and gamble on another color."

"It's the gamble that terrifies me," she said, in a low tone.

"It needn't. As long as it remains a gamble, I'll go it alone. When it turns up trumps, I'll come and ask you again. Margaret, tell me this. When I've cut the painter and made a success in something really worth while—playwriting, for example—will you——"

She cut him short.

"I can't promise, Philip. You seem to think success is the best thing in life. You scale one height, only to

rush down-hill again and make for another peak. Climbing doesn't attract me. Pinnacles make me dizzy. Contentment Road is a flat, level, commonplace thing, but it just suits me."

"It's not true. Every woman likes a man to lay achievement at her feet—to feel that for her is the thing achieved. Contentment Road!" he ended, in fine scorn. "Why, the grocer and the baker may live in Contentment Road—or dear old Peter, whose ambition would go in a nutshell!" He broke into a laugh; the angry, argumentative flush passed from his face, succeeded by the old, humorous smile.

On that pleasanter note he left her, and ran down to say good-bye to Mrs. Chuff.

"Well, dearie, the best o' friends must part," said that lady, wiping wet hands ineffectually on an even wetter roller-towel. "Farewell, a long farewell to all me greatness," the ridiculous creature quoted dramatically, her head bowed on her chest, and her damp hands clenched, in a presumably Wolsey pose. She wheezed into a roar of laughter. "My goodness, I wish I could say farewell to all *my* greatness," she shouted. "Formettes won't do it, that's flat."

"I don't want to find a slim, young thing calling herself Mrs. Chuff, when I get back," warned Philip. "You leave yourself alone. You're just right."

"Oh, I know meself, pet. I'm jest a ole elephant. It's true what they ses in the play—a tiger can't change 'is spots. Oh, well, come back safe an' soun', dearie, an' don't get marryin' one o' them Sydney gals. I got me eye on a Victorian for you. 'Ere, do it on both cheeks, so's they won't be jealous."

Philip was to meet Peter at the station. When he reached the departure platform, a noisy, laughing group was clustered round a car window, "seeing off" a friend. As he passed, one of the party happened to turn.

It was Mazie.

"Fancy meeting you!" she greeted him, mockingly. Mazie was the last person of whose existence he cared to be reminded just then.



"How do you come here?" he asked. "I thought the company was playing Adelaide and the West before coming over here."

"They are. I'm not with them. M. J. Field advertised for show girls, and I jumped in. M.J.'s going to be a big shout in Australia, take it from me. It's worth while to get in with him. Oodles of coin, and he knows what some of the others only suspect, that the public like pretty girls better than pretty plays. There'll be a dust-up one of these days between M.J. and Masters' crowd, an' if you look close, it'll be M.J. who'll be shakin' down his cuffs after the fight. You take it from me."

"What are you supposed to do?" he asked.

"Look pretty," she flashed.

"That's easy work," he commented. "And does the great M.J. pay well for looks?"

"Not as well as he might. But it's early days. He's free with his coin otherwise. Five pound note under every plate on his birthday last week. M.J.'s a prince. Not that we couldn't do with more than £3 a week. There's plenty to do on it, and Treasury seems a year off by Tuesday morning. I owe old Bignett two weeks. I s'pose you're not feeling too flush."

Philip owed her something. An indefinite feeling of shame pricked at him. Half an hour ago he had been begging Margaret to marry him. The contrast was sharp—and yet Mazie had meant a great, flooding experience to him. He took three sovereigns from his pocket.

"Look here, old girl. A word of advice. Keep square with the landladies, even if you go a bit short on clothes. Send Mrs. Bignett a postal note." He pressed the money into her hand. "You'll have to be careful on £3 a week.

"Specially if you only get two out of that," Mazie said. "You're a brick, Phil. I'll let you have it again."

"Only £2. How's that?" he took her up.

"Oh, I borrowed a tanner from M.J. for exes.—shoes and frills, y'know. He discourages red flannel thingummies. Treasury keeps back a quid till I'm square with the world."

"How does he expect you to live in the meantime?"

"His troubles," she laughed. "Scratch round, I suppose. That's the girl's business."

"That's rotten." His generosity, always quick, was touched. "That's asking for trouble. I say, wait here a shake." A little while before he had seen Peter's big figure hovering near the entrance gate. Philip signaled him.

"Want to introduce you to a friend," he said. "This is Peter Wister, Mazie. For downright, hard-boiled common sense, he's a champion. I warn you, he's not frivolous. He's going to be your guardian, understand?" He turned to his friend. "Peter," he said, "this kid is a silly, impulsive, extravagant little ass, with hardly enough to live on. She's been a good sort to me, and I'm going to make you responsible for her. Lecture her, scold her—you can smack her if you like. If she's really up against it for cash, dole her out a sovereign or two, never more. Debit me. She's a legacy, Peter, and I hand her to you as such."

Peter stared dumbly at his new ward, who rippled into sudden laughter.

"He doesn't look much like a grandpa," she said; "but that's what I'm going to call him. Is he to tuck me into my little beddie-byes? I'll bet I get him into mischief."

"I'll bet you don't," retorted Philip, grimly. "Where are you living?"

"Only came over yesterday. My friend and I are going to room together. Last night we stayed at a hotel."

"Perhaps Mrs. Chuff——," began Peter.

"Too expensive," said Philip, hastily, frowning at Peter. "They'll easily find 'digs.' There's the bell. I'll have to hop it."

"I'll see she's fixed," promised Peter. "Any message to Margaret?"

"N—no," said Philip. The whistle blew, and the long Express pulled out.

"Who's Margaret?" asked Mazie, impudently.

"A friend of ours," the guileless Peter informed her. "I say, was that a joke about putting you in my charge?"

"Not it," she affirmed; "so don't you renege on your promise, Grandpa." She gurgled delightedly to see him blush.

"Anything in reason I can do," he promised.

"And where will an S.O.S. reach you?" she wanted to know.

He penciled the address on a card. Then he left her.

It never entered Peter's head that Philip could have had any reason for his attitude to Mazie. Sex is a subject on which youth is, in general, very shy. There is a period when sudden knowledge blazes into surprised speech, in an effort to find out if experience is common. But the advance is halting and shamefaced, and is met with a reception that chides it into uneasy silence.

At Queen's, however, in that splendid license which fearlessness grants to the questioning mind, there had been the relief of speech. Discussions sprang up out of nothing, and this mysterious quality of sex had been held up and examined, its texture had been handled and tested; it had, moreover, been the subject of cold, dispassionate, almost metaphysical argument, in which desire died away, whilst at the other pole of interest, it had served as a basis of warm, introspective analysis.

There had been occasions, too, where this had paved the way for intimate confession of individual weakness. The place of Woman in the Cosmos gave way, suddenly and urgently, to the place of Woman in the particular.

How keenly Peter recalled the seismic night, when, in the company of half a dozen men, such a talk began on an arid, high plane of ethics. On an instant it blazed, lighting up vividly the dark place in one man's soul. Henry Jenner, studying for the Methodist ministry, a quiet, unassuming, retiring, capable man, of an unobtrusive influence, listened to Philip's views.

"Women are sacred to me," said Philip. "Those beasts who can't think of love apart from the sexual impulse ought to be drowned." And, with the vast ignorance of youth at its sweetest, its purest, most chival-

rous, most dogmatic, most intolerant stage, he had thereupon enunciated views in which chastity in marriage formed an amazing ideal.

Jenner suddenly burst out.

"Chastity! What an impossible ideal. You fools! You blasted fools! It sickens me to see you pull out your little foot-rules and proceed to measure humanity. You and your ignorant word-spinning about elemental forces! You're like gnats flying round big machinery in motion, thinking they're producing it. I'm tortured—day after day and night after night; I'm obsessed by the thought of women; maddened by a thirst for women. If I were allowed to marry, it would be different; but the church forbids marriage until I have reached a certain position. Just at an age when a man ought to marry, civilization says he mustn't, because of a damned economical obstacle. It's killing me. I've got to leave the church. Can't you see the tremendous place sex holds in the world? First place, as God meant it to be; else why did He give us this fierce creative instinct?"

One of the most horrified at that uncontrollable, primal outburst was Philip, with his pink and white schemes for marital chastity. Peter remembered, too, the sudden hush that came upon the room, the stumbling exit of Jenner, the inconsequent, idiotic babbling of the others, in a vain effort to throw upon the air syllables that should banish the echoes of that terrible cry from the heart. Then the tremendously unconcerned departure of the three men, who had listened with Peter and Philip—"Good-night, you chaps"—"Good-night, old son. Shove this letter out for the post; it's got to go to-night."

Jenner had gone—out into the waters which had closed over his head.

For long he remained for Peter as an abnormality, a diseased being with a deformed mind. Philip's purity had shone the brighter because of it, and by that Peter would have sworn as by his gods. His own nature had been repressed on that account. Philip's ideals must be his ideals. A reverence for women that accounted them all equal, with the exception of a few outcasts, a soiled

fringe of an otherwise immaculate garment, held him to his determination.

Thus he accepted Mazie in good faith as a pal who had been good to Phil in dark days.

It was a week before he heard from her.

"Come and see me," a note ran. "I'm in a mess, and I need Grandpa. Tons of love.—Mazie."

He smiled at the "tons of love." Green as he was, he was shrewd enough to estimate at its value the facile love of a chorus girl, which was weighed out to new acquaintances in "tons." It was five o'clock. He put on his hat and went round to the house. Surprisingly it was in the next street.

"Miss Sefton?" repeated the woman who opened the door, fastening the top button of a shapeless garment which protected a better one underneath from the grime of housework. "All right. Go up. It's just at the top of the stairs. Six is the number."

He was invited to enter. It was a bedroom, with two beds in it. Cheap, tawdry knickknacks adorned the walls, hideous with a shiny paper, that imitated ugly marble. Ribbons were tied to whatever would take them. A huge "kewpie" sat in smiling, vacuous nakedness on the table, which was covered by a tablecloth, threadbare, stained, faded.

Mazie was doing her hair in front of the glass, her fine arms held aloft, bare of any covering, a pale-blue slip-bodice allowing full revelation of their shapeliness. She turned her head as he entered.

"It's Grandpa," she welcomed him. "And prompt, I will say. Half a tick and the roof will be on." She deftly twisted the heavy plaits, and with her first two fingers coiled them on her head, pinning them into position.

"What's the trouble?" asked the direct Peter.

"Squattez-vous," she invited, and motioned to the bed. He sat.

"What's the mess?" He varied the inquiry. He tried to look unconcerned at being in a girl's bedroom. What man, born of woman, will not pretend he is used

to delicate situations? But still he got a little thrill, partly of horror, with a faint tinge of pleasure in adventure, when she crossed the room and locked the door.

"No sense in letting Florrie butt in," she said, calmly. "I'm broke, Grandpa," she added.

"Broke!" he echoed.

"Just like that," she mocked, with an inflection that imitated his. "I've not a penny to pay the old girl downstairs, and to-morrow I'll be a full member of the 'Out-you-go' Society, unless I find the money."

"Just a vulgar 'touch,'" thought Peter, in spite of his ordinary chivalrous viewpoint, and then, in one astounding second, she was crying on the bed beside him, all her pitiful attempt at pertness gone. More astonishing still, she was crying damply on Peter's unresponsive shoulder, and he found himself dabbing at her with a big handkerchief, and patting her inefficiently.

"Tell me how it happened," he said, and it seemed that he had actually taken command of the situation. He was a man. She sat up, and dried her eyes.

"It was Treasury last night," she explained, "and I'd drawn £2, 'cos they're keeping a quid back to pay off a tenner they lent me. I went to supper with a chap—Florrie, that's my friend, had another fellow. They were in front, at the show. My chap collared my bag, in fun, you know, and when he gave it to me back, the money had gone."

"But you ought to have given him in charge," said Peter, hotly.

"Aw, a girl can't go getting herself mixed up with the police. It was just a joke, I thought. But he said he had really dropped it, when he was fooling in the street. Anyway, there it is."

"Didn't he offer to pay it back?" asked Peter.

"Not he. He had hardly enough to pay for the supper, he said."

"The swine!" shouted the indignant Peter. "The unspeakable bounder! Who was he? You've got to tell me."

"I don't know."

"But his name?"

"How should I know? I called him 'Bert.' His friend called him that."

"But—good Lord, what the devil do you want to go to supper with a beast like that for?" Peter was raging. Was it an orderly, sensible old world or not? "Why the devil can't you come home like a decent girl after the show, and go to bed? You deserve to lose your money."

"Here, steady, Grandpa," she begged. "I went to supper 'cos I jolly well wanted to eat. I was empty as a drum. So'd you be after a scone and a cup of tea."

"But why not feed yourself decently?" he broke out.

She smiled at his ignorance.

"Aw, d'ye think it runs to three meals a day, as well as a room?" she mocked. "Look here, a lotta people think we girls have a gay an' giddy time, with our champagne suppers an' all. It's a rumor, dearie, that what's it is, a rumor. We get £3 a week—£2 for little Mazie for the next few weeks—I pay a quid for a room and breakfast, and a beauty chorus must dress decently on the street; you'd soon hear from Crotty if you didn't—there's shoes and stockings, there's undies and what-nots Grandpa's too innocent ever to have heard of, an' there's hats, gloves and frocks. There ain't much change left for meals. Well, we always try to get 'em on the nod. If a Willie-boy wants to take me to lunch, why, let him, and if I'm clever enough to jolly him along and get something for nothing, that's one to me."

Peter grew red.

"Perhaps he won't give something for nothing," he suggested.

"Well, p'raps he won't. But it's always a little while before he finds you're not going to pay. Then it just depends on how much up against it you are," she said.

"But you're up for sale," he put it to her, bluntly.

"You can sometimes dodge the buyer," she retorted;

"anyway, I have up to now. I don't call Phil a buyer. That was different."

He missed the point, in his desperate attempt to unravel a new social problem. All very well to say that these girls are not forced to take the position.

"You mean to say you *have* to allure and entice men like that rotter to feed you, because otherwise you might have to go without?"

"Clever Grandpa," she said.

"And if they insist on the price, you've got to pay?"

"Some of the girls have to. It's a gamble," she said, unaware how her blunt statement of a daily situation grated on his nerves.

"Then it's damnable," he burst out.

"Of course you're right, dearie, but where does that get us? I can't go down to Mrs. Lance and tell her my Grandpa says it's damnable that I can't pay her, can I?"

"And do the girls dislike all this cadging for lunch and dinner?" he asked.

"Well, to be quite honest, some of 'em don't care twopence as long as they save on it themselves. Others hate it. We all know men are absolute rotters. There's always the chance that we can get on with another fellow before Number One turns nasty. It's rather fun if you keep your nerve."

"Here, I'll leave this for you," said Peter, suddenly sick of the tawdry room, of the blue slip, of the grinning kewpie. He got up.

"Thanks, old boy. I knew you'd see me through for Phil's sake." She unlocked the door. Then she turned naturally to him, and put her arms up.

"You're a good sort, Algernon," she said; "come again."

It was in his mind to tell her that he was not one that need be dodged, but he refrained.

She gave him, unprotesting and passive, the easy kiss of the girl to whom kisses mean nothing. A thought struggled for utterance in his mind. He might save her from some of the worst of this hunting.

"I—I'm good for a lunch sometimes," he stammered.



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"Perhaps you might turn down those rotters for good, if you knew I was a stand-by."

She looked at him curiously.

"Righto. Mazie's on. But what do you get out of it?" she asked.

"I don't want a damn thing out of it," said Peter, violently, and slammed the door.

## CHAPTER XVI

*"Prophets have honor all over the Earth,  
Except in the village where they were born;  
Where such as knew them boys from birth  
Nature-ally hold 'em in scorn."*

—PROPHETS AT HOME

FROM Sydney Philip traveled with the Company to Brisbane for a short season, and after a return visit to Sydney dates for Western Australia and New Zealand had to be fulfilled.

Margaret received letters with flattering frequency, letters full of acute comments on the places he was visiting, but singularly devoid of human interest. It was typical of Philip's attitude to life. People never interested him in the mass, though he was capable of the most sincere admiration of individuals whose circle chanced to cut his own orbit.

With reservations, Peter was quite alert enough to note, these letters were read aloud, in the peaceful atmosphere of No. One, Contentment Road. One piece of news delighted them both.

"I am working hard on the play once more," he wrote from Western Australia, "being intensely bored with this hole and the uninteresting crowd I am traveling with. It just supplies an urgent need, and, as we seldom rehearse these days, I lock myself into my room and write. I'm going to try and persuade Masters to overcome his prejudice for local work, and produce the thing."

"It will be sparkling, like himself," Margaret prophesied.

"His stagecraft ought to be good," Peter thought;

"not many men have had his practical experience, and stagecraft is almost more important than plot."

Peter spoke with the sureness of knowledge. Ingram had at last placed him on the staff of the paper, and he had been doing the dramatic criticism for two months, on the understanding that he must not say all he thought.

With those orders, Peter had not made much of a reputation for dramatic taste. Readers who had chafed at a bad play read his mild praise and shrugged their shoulders at his ideas. An office boy could have reviewed plays quite as well as any critic on the staff of an Australian daily.

Philip came back to Sydney, his finished play in his bag, prepared to make his first onslaught in a new rôle. He waylaid Masters on the first opportunity.

Masters was an enormous mass of a man, shrewd, not over well-educated, but with an uncanny sense of dramatic values.

He looked at Philip with little, twinkling eyes.

"A play, eh? Yours? See here, Lee, I've known many a good actor turn into a rotten bad playwright. You stick to grease-paint."

"I want to look at the stage from the front, for a change, Mr. Masters. I think I can write a good play. All I want you to say is this—if you think it is any good. Don't turn it down because it's not been tried out abroad."

"Not on your life. We're looking for good things, and we don't care a tiny, tinker's curse where they come from."

No Australian manager can be got to admit that he is afraid of an Australian play, yet practically none has been produced originally in its land of origin. The *imprimatur* of the "big men" has always been awaited.

"I'd like to read it to you," proposed Philip, with the beautiful faith of every young dramatist that the nobles lines will suffer in the cold indifference of the managerial eye. What if he should skip!

Masters roared at him.

"Not on your life! Leave the dam' thing here, and

I'll give it the 'once over.' Don't think I can touch it till the week after next. I've got that 'Wallingford' company on the incoming boat, and I'm full to the neck."

The postponement was a bitter disappointment to the author. An immediate reading, a dawning look of interest that became gradual absorption, a delighted holding out of the fat hands, an eager, "Splendid! We'll do it for you, my boy. What are your terms?"—these had been quite ordinary concomitants of his day dreams. This callous, cold reception chilled him enormously.

"Not till then!" he echoed, dismally.

"Try some of the others first, and then bring it to me," recommended Masters, swinging his fat bulk in his chair, and tossing the precious manuscript back to its beggetter.

This was worse still. So little did he appreciate the chance that he was willing to let his rivals avail themselves of the opportunity.

Philip rolled up the parcel. His spirits were at zero.

"Soulless beast!" he thought, and coldly muttered a good-bye.

"Bye," shouted Masters. "Take this letter, Miss Dean," and straightway forgot Philip.

In his sore mood, he thought with grim pleasure of Mazie's prophecy that M. J. Field would wipe the floor with Masters and Edwards. He hoped he would. Field! Didn't somebody tell him that Field was putting a Comedy Company on the road? He was a good Australian, whatever else he was. Didn't he make a specialty of Australian stars? Why not of Australian plays?

He turned abruptly on his heel, and made his way to Field's office. After an hour's waiting he was shown into the room.

A large room, with an enormous leather settee along one side of it. A sideboard with assorted drinks occupied a prominent position, not too far from the handsome center table, so that the entrepreneur could reach for sustenance without getting up. A thick, handsome

carpet deadened all sound on the floor. A few pictures, several Norman Lindsay sketches, more or less erotic, and myriads of photographs of beautiful women covered the four walls. It was the sanctum of a devotee. This man worshiped beauty—the beauty of the human body, whether it was the clean, muscular, silky beauty of the stripped prizefighter, or the soft, curving lines of a woman. It appeared in every feature of his room, which held in its atmosphere the subtle aroma of the merchandise in which Field dealt. It appeared in the man himself, as he sat at his table, a smile on his dark face, a soft fire in his fine eyes; it appeared in his lips, full and well-shaped, the lips of a man with an appreciation of the fatness of life, its wines, its horses, its music, its women.

Some one has called Field the foulest-tongued and best hearted man in Australia. It may very possibly be so. Certain it is that there is no corner of the continent but contains some man or woman who can speak from the heart of his generosity. The woman who has been unfortunate has been helped to her feet, times without number. What matters it if the kindness has been accompanied by a jest offensive to ears polite? More than likely it was made to relieve the recipient of his bounty of any feeling of embarrassment.

He delighted to plant in land where other men had failed to reap harvest. He it was who first broke the fetish that Australians would only pay money to hear imported stars. Others had tried and failed. When he turned a beautiful chorus girl into a leading-woman, he was boyish in his pride and delight in the achievement, and his triumph was invariably graced by the girl whom he had last placed in the theatrical heaven. "Field always hitches his wagon to his star," someone wittily remarked, and the *mot* gained popularity. Field heard it, and helped it to new notoriety.

Unlike most men of the type, he was hugely popular with other men. His good nature, his love of a jest, even if it were against himself, his phenomenal success, which he called his luck, all helped to make him accep-

table, in spite of a certain blatancy he displayed. And finally, he was accessible to everybody, however doubtful the applicant might be. He called this "never overlooking a bet."

Philip was greeted with cordiality, being well-known to Field by sight.

"Hullo, old man; come to tell me you're ready to sign on with me?" he greeted him, thrusting a box of giant cigars towards the part of the table where Philip's chair was facing.

"Not just yet," smiled Philip.

"You might go a — sight further and fare a — sight worse," was the easy reply.

"I'm sure of that," said Philip. "Wherever I go I hear your praises sung."

"The hell you do. I'm glad of that. So many of these — that work for me are just —, and you can send that to the papers and say M.J. said so."

"If I sent the remark to the papers, there'd be no need to say who said it," laughed Philip. "It carries its own autograph."

"Oh, you're one of those sarcastic —," Field growled. "Never know where I am with hounds like you. Well, have a drink, anyway." He leaned back, and reached a bottle and a couple of glasses from the sideboard.

"Thanks." There was silence. The gurgle of the whisky and the clink of the glasses made pleasing duet. Then:

"Chin-chin," said Field, and Philip completed the solemn ritual.

"Now!" It was an invitation to begin business.

"You're Australian, first, last and all the time, I've heard, Mr. Field," began Philip.

"There's a touch coming. I feel it," phopped M.J. "I won't admit I am, till I see where the admission's going to land me."

"I've got a play—," commenced Philip, plunging.

Field jumped from his chair, hands spread out in defense.

"Help!" he yelled. "Anything but that. Not a——play, I ask you."

Philip hastened to disavow the color, at least.

"What are you frightened of?" he asked, when Field had resumed his seat.

"I'll tell you, Lee, on the understanding it goes no further. Australians can't write plays; there you have it in a —— nutshell."

"Haddon Chambers was an Australian," Philip argued.

"Are you a Haddon Chambers?" inquired Field. "If you are, I'll —— well back you with my whole —— roll."

"I think I am," plunged Philip. "Now it's up to you to read my stuff and pass an opinion yourself."

"Well, I like your —— decorated —— guts!" exclaimed Field. "What is it? Not an oratorio! That's the one thing I won't produce."

"A comedy," said Philip.

"High-brow?" inquired Field. "There's no money in high-brow stuff."

"A baby could understand it," Philip assured him.

"Any erotic bits? I'm down on that sort of thing, unless it's in silver paper."

"Nothing to offend a girl of sixteen," the author guaranteed.

"That's not the point. Anything to shock her mother?"

"Not a thing."

"Right. So far. Now let's have a look."

"Let me read you the first act," begged Philip.

"I'm choosing a prize beauty at 11 o'clock," Field said. "But I'll have a go at it this afternoon, and mark down the points for laughs."

"What?" asked Philip.

"That's how I judge a play, by the laughter; that is, if it's a comedy. I give ten marks for a scream, eight for a gurgle, six for a ripple, four for a giggle, while smiles work out at two, and for a sudden yelp in a barren place I allot as high as twelve. A side must measure up to 100, or the play's no —— good."

Philip yelped himself at this original way of judging literary work.

"That's right; go on, laugh your — head off! There's a dam' sight more sense in my way than waiting for an audience to give you the — bird. Not that you can't fall in whichever way you go. Go on, clear out an' tell 'em outside to pass in them beauties one by one. You hounds will laugh on the other side of your fool heads when M.J. drafts this lot of fillies."

"How do you decide on *their* points?" inquired Philip, curiously.

"The Associate Director looks 'em over first—legs, hips, chest, face—and then he sends the undamaged ones in to me. It's the best indoor sport there is. Toddle along, I can hear the mob. And come again to-morrow and hear about this rubbish." He tossed the manuscript into a drawer, and smiled friendly dismissal. Philip came out, and passed through a crowd of assorted girls with a warm feeling of liking for the quaint personality of the man who had it in his power to start him on a new career.

"There goes Philip Lee," he heard a loud whisper, and a chorus of laughter.

"If M.J. went on his play system, some of those would mark high for giggles," he thought.

The next day he called again.

"Well, I've read it," said M.J. "And I tell you I'm in a — maze. I'm not saying it's not clever. It is — clever. I laughed, too—dam' funny, situations but — me if ever I heard a servant talk as that bird you bring on does. Of course, she makes 'm laugh, but—oh, Lord, I dunno. There's something about it I'm scared of. I'm new at this play business. Girls I know, and revues I can buy, and 'long's you sling catchy music and shapely legs at the crowd, they'll buzz around, and cash up at the box-office; but this — thing of yours, well, I tell you I'm — well beat. I'd like to do it, and in a way I think I could put it over by spendin' a hell of a lot on ads. and workin' the all-Australian dodge overtime; let's see—" his voice



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trailed off, as he reckoned up the cost, "we could do with only the one setting, and I've got the stuff for that. The mounting wouldn't come to a hell of a lot—I'll—risk it, damned if I won't and I'll show those hounds they needn't — well go to London for a show. Yes, Lee, I'll gamble on it, but you've got to take a risk with me. No advance royalties, understand. If it goes, all well and good—if it's a frost, you're in the cart with M.J. Does that go?"

"You're all they said you were, M.J.," said Philip.

"You needn't get nasty," said Field. "How about a — drink?"

## CHAPTER XVII

*"And what is Art whereto we press  
Through paint and prose and rhyme,—  
When Nature in her nakedness  
Defeats us every time!"*

—THE BENEFACTORS

**P**HILIP, as ever acting on first impulse, had no sooner arranged the details of the production with Field, than he brought to an end his connection with Masters and Edwards. His year was up, but the contract provided for an extension at the firm's option. They had been dilly-dallying, attempting to screw him down in his demands for an increase of salary, and in the attempt had over-reached themselves, for by a blunder they allowed their days of grace to flit by, without nailing the elusive Philip down. He availed himself of the loop-hole, and, in spite of threats of a law suit, he slipped out of their clutches.

This news, together with the acceptance of the wonderful play, he wired to Margaret. Hardly had she and Peter got over the surprise, when they received a greater one. For Philip, having got Field to promise a Melbourne *première*, had followed hard upon his telegram, and presented himself to the delighted Mrs. Chuff, with a demand for his own room.

Peter was out, but Margaret welcomed him at the door of Number One, her face all smiles, and a light of welcome in her eyes that made the home-coming Philip feel that all would yet be well with him.

"Well, this is breath taking," she said, "and Field has really and truly taken the play!"

"Of course." Philip tried to be nonchalant. "Didn't I tell you I would be a great man? This is only an instalment."

They were seated, by this time, and he leaned over and took her hands.

"You love me, Margaret; your face showed it as I came up the stairs. Why don't you make me happy by saying it?" His voice possessed that velvet tenderness that used to thrill the women in his audiences. A thought flushed Margaret's brow. "How beautifully he makes love!" It was a remark she had overheard in the lobby of the theatre.

And yet, this was no make-believe. She could be sure of that. He was earnest. Her eyes met his unwillingly, but she read there an infinite longing, an enormous desire. With a great effort, she shook from her the magnetism that was almost like hypnosis.

"That is forbidden, Philip," she scolded. "Besides, the lowest step is not the top of the ladder. You have far to go."

"But you said you hated heights," he countered.

For a moment she was nonplussed. He had turned her own weapon against her.

"And if you hated them, too, it would be different," she found voice to say. "But only heights satisfy you, so you must reach them, before you can afford luxuries."

"How you would help a fellow to make a career," he said, longingly. "I've chucked the stage life you hated, Margaret. Be a sport, take a chance, and let's gamble."

How persuasive his voice was! How the lonely months of his absence called to her! It would be easy, delightful, to give him what he wished. He would succeed. He was just the sort, and perhaps she would be able to anchor him to solid earth. It was a dangerous moment. Peter broke the spell. He came up the stairs two at a time, and burst into the room, his big hand outstretched.

"You old boulder, to think of steading a march on us like this! Jove, this is great! And how long are you going to stop this trip?"

Margaret had risen swiftly, at his first coming, and had quickly shaken herself into normal seeming.

"Oh, this is an indefinite business, old son," Philip

cried, thumping his friend, exuberantly. "Behold the new Haddon Chambers!"

"Absolutely ripping!" Peter enthused. "You're thinner, though; isn't he, Margaret?"

Margaret looked at him critically, trying desperately to make her inspection without any special significance.

"Um—rather," she said; "but I'm not alarmed about him."

"Now tell us about the play," begged Peter. "Are we to read the masterpiece, or it is to burst on us in the glory of a first-night?"

"Don't be more of an ass than you can help," said Philip. "You can read it whenever you want to."

"I vote we make him read it aloud to us, Margaret—to-night. How does that strike you?" Peter was in a triumphant mood. His belief in Philip never soared so high.

"Good business. I know he's dying to," Margaret commented, and the author grinned in an embarrassed way, and called them fatheads. But he promised to do what they asked.

"Have you got a good cast?" asked Margaret. "That's the important point."

"Field wanted me to do lead myself, for the advertisement, but—I don't know—I felt I wanted to be oh, you know—detached. You get the wrong perspective from the stage."

"Right," commended Peter; "the stage box for the blushing author, and a ripping speech at the end of the play—you know—I little expected to be called upon to make a speech, ladies and gentlemen, and in any case, I have mislaid my notes—and then just spificate them with an extempore speech that's taken you three days to work up."

"What have you been doing to Peter, Margaret?" asked Philip, in surprise. "Have you been feeding him on meat? He's quite full of conversation, not to mention gentle badinage. I don't recognize him."

"He's in love, between ourselves, Phil," said Margaret. "I caught him coming out of a house in Spring

Street the other afternoon, with an extremely pretty girl waving to him over the balcony. You should have seen his pinkness, when he caught my motherly eye upon him."

Peter was pink now. He had been on an errand of periodic mercy to Mazie, when Margaret had surprised him, and he had debated whether he ought not to tell her who the girl was. He had decided against it. Mazie was a decent little sort, but Margaret was—Margaret.

"The sly beggar," Philip said, "and not a word to the family about her. I shouldn't wonder if he were married. He's getting a princely salary, he tells me."

"It doesn't carry royalties," retorted Peter, and this brought them back to the play again.

That night the play was read. There were verbal fireworks that irresistibly reminded the listener of Oscar Wilde. The play of words was clever. If it wearied by forcing the mind to a continuous strain so as not to miss the essential word on which the next bit of dialogue, or a good piece of repartee, depended, it amused by its whimsical twists and turns. But nothing happened. Nothing could happen. The people talked so much that there was no room for event.

As Philip closed the script, he looked up for comment. Peter's face still wore the smile the ridiculous curtain "tag" had called up; Margaret was laughing aloud in real enjoyment.

"Ripping, old chap—immense. Fun enough in it for two comedies," he applauded.

"And what became of Amanda, after all?" asked Margaret.

"Oh, who the dickens cares what becomes of her?" cried Peter, and put an unconscious finger on the hidden weakness of the whole play. The characters did not develop themselves. They interested one only in their neat remarks, never in themselves. Nobody cared what became of Amanda, because there was no such person. Amanda was a name, to which certain clever speeches were assigned, not a person to whom something might happen.

This did not strike the two friendly critics, who were seduced into admiration, firstly because the loved Philip had penned those undeniably clever lines, secondly because a shrewd business man had thought the thing good enough to risk money in, and thirdly, owing to the bright confidence with which Philip pointed out how this scene "would get 'em," and this situation would "take."

He was delighted with the appreciation they showed, and graciously invited them to rehearsals so that they would see how a play was built up.

Before rehearsals began, however, Dr. Payne was permitted to read it. "Amanda Mustn't" was the title. When he laid it down Philip was not in the room. He had gone down to the theatre.

"Will I be hanged, drawn and quartered, if I say this isn't a great play?" he asked.

"There will be something done to you with boiling oil in it," said Margaret, indignantly. Peter was like a ruffled mastiff. His voice was gruff, as he asked:

"Could you write a better one, my friend?"

"Oh, oh, oh, and who's treading on his friend's literary corns?" retorted Payne, imitating Peter's low growl. "In that case, I must never risk the opinion that it's not a play at all."

"Then would you inform a waiting world what it is?" inquired Margaret, sweetly, with a dangerous gleam in her eye.

"Yes, if I can sit near the door. I'm not popular enough to risk remaining where I am," he answered.

"Perhaps you think also that M. J. Field doesn't know his job?" Peter suggested.

"Here, one at a time," the doctor stipulated. "I'll take Margaret first. It isn't a play, because there's precious little action in it and not a single solitary crisis. The public likes suspense."

"Hear the amateur dramatic critic!" scoffed Margaret. "The public likes to be amused, and there's enough amusement in Amanda for two plays."

"True, damsel, and I may be quite wrong. If I am, the majority of the critics are wrong with me. Peter

doesn't count. His critical powers are atrophied by his daily work. And as for Field, he's doing what every manager does in producing a new play, guessing as to how that most elusive quality, popular opinion, is going to function. He thinks the chances are in favor; I'm inclined to think they're against. And my guess is as good as his, before the numbers go up."

"Well, ours is as good as yours," retorted Margaret, "and we're enthusiastically with M. J. Field."

"I'd almost come to that conclusion," Payne smiled. "Well, had I better remove this hated being from your sight? By the way, better not tell Philip I had the gall to prophesy evil."

"We wouldn't," Peter informed him. "This play has just got to be a success. Phil has chucked the stage, and his pride would not let him go back now. If Amanda comes a cropper, he'll be properly in the soup. With his temperament, no one can reckon on what that will mean."

"Let's hope the dear public will laugh so much they won't miss events not marching," said Payne.

"I hate you, Dr. Payne," Margaret shot at him.

"Why, because I'm a bad critic?" he asked.

"No, because you're so horribly like an incarnation of common sense. You disturb me to-day like a north wind. You shrivel me."

"Then I'll blow off home," he suggested.

"You will *not*, and leave Peter and me limp and discouraged. You will just sit there and talk about something else, till we've forgotten your indiscretion. I could howl, you—you *person*."

Rehearsals re-established faith. It was one of those plays which caused unrestrained laughter in the very actors themselves—a circumstance which might have given Margaret and Peter furiously to think, had they been aware of the tradition that regards dubiously such indications of success.

Philip was at his absolute best these days. High-spirited, joyous, courageous, the thought of failure hardly entered his mind. He infused into the people

with whom the issue lay something like his own bright eagerness, and the result appeared immediately in this—that rehearsals entirely lacked that dulness and stupidity, which drive an author distracted, and filch from his lines whatever of wit and verve they may have originally had. There was no need for the usual assurance that “it would be all right on the night.”

Field watched the final rehearsal with keen interest.

“It goes,” he approved; “it — well moves like a railway train, all lit up, and clicking forty to the minute.” The box-office showed that his advertising was bearing good fruit. His Press Agent had worked overtime to impress the public that this was their chance to show they appreciated their own goods. Flaring posters on hoardings blazoned to the world M.J.’s gambling spirit, and the value of the merchandise he was offering. Margaret could never pass a poster without looking at the magic name of Philip Lee in unaccustomed small type, in place of the blatant reds and yellows which wreathed it in former announcements of romantic plays. She never failed to thrill at the deep significance of the change.

**M. J. FIELD PRESENTS  
“AMANDA MUSTN’T,”**

By  
Philip Lee.

**AN AUSTRALIAN PLAY WITH AN  
ALL-AUSTRALIAN CAST**

Philip had secured a box for the performance. They crowded into it besides Margaret, Peter and the excited author, the Doctor, Mrs. Lee, O’Dwyer, now a denizen of Number One, and Aunt Bessie.

Margaret looked at the audience with an eye altogether proprietorial. These people were going back to hundreds of homes to-night, all talking of Amanda and, naturally, of her creator. In their hands lay his future. She looked down at the rustling, whispering, smiling



stalls, greeting friends or arguing with the ushers. A fat, bald-headed man was very angry over a mistake about his seats. Perhaps his mood might determine the enjoyment of his neighbors. They were already hostile to him, as people are in a theatre when they have to draw in their knees to give passage. Margaret felt she hated him. He might spoil the play, if he went on like that. Then her excited attention wandered to the hands of the people. The tiny, gloved hands of mincing women irritated her; she noted with a thrill of approval the fat, jolly, huge hands of a man in a front seat. He had been dining with a party. They all looked as if they would enjoy it. Her ears longed for the cacophony of four thousand hands smitten together with rapture. It was the finest sound in the world.

She turned away embarrassed, when she found that her stare had been so concentrated as to make a woman examine her gloves with critical attention, in the belief that the cat in the box was eyeing them with obvious distaste. She whispered to her friend, and they both glanced up at Margaret with inimical eyes.

Then Philip brought M.J. into the box. He looked approval at Margaret.

"I want all you folks to wander down to the Savoy after all this rubbish is over," said Field. "We'll have a bottle or two and drink success to this hound," and he laid an affectionate arm on Philip's shoulder.

Margaret suddenly liked him violently. He was a dear. She would have liked to kiss him. She accepted his invitation with an almost affectionate heartiness. And wasn't Phil looking handsome? His eyes were shining; his whole personality radiated charm. No wonder M.J. liked him. It was quite on the cards that he would make another fortune for Field.

Margaret's thoughts were whirling. The theatre, too, seemed to whirl. Surely there were more lights than she had ever noticed before. Perhaps Field had had extra globes put on. It was almost a gala occasion. Was she making herself observed? She must be, because Peter leaned across and whispered to her.

"Steady, old girl." It was as though she was waking out of a dream. Mrs. Lee, she found, had been talking to her, evidently for some little time, and it was her profound inattention that had attracted to her Peter's warning.

"His father was just like that," Mrs. Lee was saying, and it was obvious that it was only the end of some observations she ought to have heard. Like what? An unreasonable curiosity possessed her. It was almost more than she could bear not to know what it was in Philip that had resembled something in his father. And yet she could not ask. She could just smile idiotically, and say, "Really?" How utterly absurd! What was the matter with her? It was only a play, and its success or failure could only matter slightly. It would be all the same in fifty years.

"What's that?" asked Dr. Payne, leaning over to her, and she woke to the disagreeable fact that she had made the remark aloud.

Then the orchestra steadied her. Field believed in decent music. These fellows played splendidly. The violins wailed; and Margaret felt, in one moment, inexpressibly sad, unutterably tired. Was it really she who lived in Contentment Road? It was some serene person she had known in times past, not this jangled, nervous girl who only noticed hundreds and hundreds of waving hands. It was as though playgoers had stayed away and only sent their hands. It was the sight of Mrs. Chuff in the Dress Circle, resplendently upholstered in violent red, which brought her back to reality. The good lady was waving a huge fan in an effort to attract her attention. Then, just as she was smiling a recognition, the lights went out, and the curtain was slowly raised.

At the end of the First Act, the suspense was over. The audience was laughing still at the recollection of the inimitable Amanda. Margaret's tiredness had vanished. A flood of joyous triumph had engulfed every petty pang she had ever felt.

"Got 'em," said M.J., popping in like a jack-in-a-

box, and then out again; and "got 'em" Margaret's heart echoed. She turned to Mrs. Lee.

"Isn't it splendid?" she said.

"I—I suppose so," replied that excellent lady, "if I only knew what it is all about. The servant is very funny, but why don't they dismiss her? Of course I know they're very hard to get, but still—pertness I never would endure. I had a servant once—Philip would remember her—oh, he's gone; but never mind. I suppose it's all right, but it worries me."

Margaret turned to Payne, who sat behind her.

"Well, old croaker, and who's right now?" she openly triumphed over him.

"You are—now," he admitted; "but don't forget there are others besides Mrs. Lee who would like to know what it's all about. They are going to be told presently that it's all about nothing at all, and it takes a Shakespeare to write a thing like that."

"Oh!" Margaret turned her back on him, and began to add Peter's enthusiasm to her own flame. Thus replenished, it blazed higher than ever.

Then Philip came back to the box, and took with the finest deprecation the compliments showered upon him. The curtain went up for the Second Act.

Now an audience will not grumble if nothing begins to happen in the first act. They are content with amusing explosions, in the belief that a play must be built up gradually. Laughter is precious to the multitude, and there are certain entertainments in which it is all-sufficing. But if they are led to expect a play, a play they want.

It soon became apparent that Amanda was only going to show them more of her funny tricks. She was not a part of the whole, which would be gradually unfolded. She was the whole herself, and surrounded herself with a clever company of individuals who sparkled, coruscated, glittered, threw showers of phosphorescent verbiage upon the air, somersaulted with words, and in a phenomenally clever way got no further with any story. Inevitably the attention of part of the audience

wandered. Amanda screamed with laughter, but the audience did not join in. When actors stress a joke with their own laughter, it frequently dries up mirth on the other side of the footlights. All experienced actors will tell you that it is the man who appears unconscious that he has said anything funny who draws tears of helpless laughter from an audience.

Laughter then, once withdrawn, people commence to look for the real thing that makes a play—action, action, and plenty of it, all leading up to a crisis the solution of which is the thing that draws from the onlookers the sigh that is the real success of a play.

Philip had overlooked that. He was clever, but cleverness needs a well of human sympathy. It cannot function alone for public amusement.

The house was silent. Margaret, suddenly cold with horror, with the knowledge that failure was glooming out of that darkened amphitheater, that those closed, rigid mouths, which a few minutes before had been making a hideously attractive noise, possessed the same power that turned-down thumbs held of old, felt that she could bear no longer to sit there, watching a disaster. Yet to move would have been equally impossible.

Bitterly she detested the silent crowd, critical and cold, in the darkened house. Why didn't they laugh? Why didn't they applaud? And yet she could do neither herself. With a shock of dismay she realized that she was only interested in the result, not in the play itself. Amanda bored her, bored her cruelly. It was Amanda's fault. Why didn't she *do* something, the idiotic creature? Payne was right; Field was wrong. It didn't "move." She glanced at Philip, who had pulled a chair close beside her. He watched the stage with a stony face. Only a faint light showed it to her; chiefly she was conscious of a gleaming white expanse of shirt-front. What was he thinking? Was he sensing the coming failure? She had a desire to touch his hand, but she had not the courage. Besides, it would seem to him like a premature judgment.

When the lights went on she had a chance to observe him. His high courage never faltered; he smiled at her with just the same gay sureness. Whatever he felt, he did it well. His was a fighting spirit. Peter looked depressed, but smiled at her manfully, as she caught his eye. Payne leaned over.

"Pretty good dialogue in that last Act; a bit over the heads of some of these duffers, though."

It was the sort of speech one makes to comfort where no comfort is. Field hustled in.

"Rotten cold audience. Some of those hounds ought to have their brains taken out and cleaned; too many cobwebs. Big laugh in this last Act that'll get them. You watch them wake up."

They did not wake up, however. They had been fleeced, and their attitude showed it. A few people laughed at the wit of the dialogue, but the temper of the house was unmistakable, and in a theater the majority sets the mood.

A desultory cry for the author was set up when the final curtain fell. Philip did not respond. Field came in as they were rising for departure with some breezy prophecies for future performances, but Margaret felt numbed. So it was a failure. There was recognition of the fact in the faces of her friends. Payne looked sympathetically at Philip. Had there been a trace of the "I told you so" manner in him, she felt she could never have forgiven him. Philip was explaining something to Aunt Bessie. As she watched his gallant smile, and felt that so he would smile though his house were toppling in ruins, something—was it pride? was it fear?—broke in on her. As though it had been her own mind, she was vouchsafed an instantaneous vision of what he must be feeling. Cast from the heights of his apogee, when his exaltation was further from earth than ever before in his career; shorn of the hope in whose light he had gone so bravely forward, after that impulsive burning of boats, she saw, in one flashing, incandescent second that behind that smile must lurk the bitter realization that he had lost everything.

Not everything, she vowed silently to herself. These cold, critical cattle would not triumph over him. There was something he wished for that lay in her gift. Swiftly she went over to him. Had she hesitated, commonsense might once more have chilled her intention. He turned at her coming. Her cold hand sought and found his. In one breathless whisper she turned his night into day.

"I will marry you whenever you like, Phil," she told him. Peter saw his face flame with sudden delight. That drama had "moved," came the thought, and with it a stab of pain.

END OF BOOK TWO.

## BOOK III.—FLAME

### CHAPTER XVIII

*"Buy my English posies!  
You that will not turn—  
Buy my hot-wood clematis, .  
Buy a frond o' fern  
Gathered where the Erskine leaps  
Down the road to Lorne—  
Buy my Christmas creeper,  
And I'll say where you were born!"*

*West away from Melbourne dust holidays begin—  
They that mock at Paradise woo at Cora Lynn—  
Through the great South Otway gums sings the great South Main,  
Take the flower and turn the hour, and kiss your love again!"*  
—THE FLOWERS

**T**HEY were married.

For a week Margaret had rejoiced in her courage. It is a tremendous thing to discover you have a giant's strength, which enables you to stretch out a hand to a toppling world and set it on the perpendicular once more.

In Philip's delight she found her own. His ardor set fire to her. His spirit, never long overcast, forgot Amanda and her failure before the scant week of her course had run. He hardly noted the fact that M. J. Field had recognized the verdict of the first night audience to be one that was not likely to be reversed on appeal. The title of the ill-starred play had, in effect, been firmly repeated by Field, and Amanda had taken her too well-made humorisms into retirement.

But what cared Philip! At the moment he never

thought of plays and play-writing. His mind was soaring radiantly into the possibilities that life with Margaret would bring him. He had achieved his highest hopes. Henceforth, it would be but a decent of the mountain, unless he could keep Margaret always with him on the summit. And he would. He vowed he would. For them both the heights. Not for such a rare spirit as Margaret the flatness of the plain. After irritating delay, and wrecking disappointment he had won his big success, and life was all too short for its enjoyment. Why then the dust and gritty sand of the arena?

Payne, on his part, was unpleasantly reminded by Philip's gay enthusiasm of that old childhood incident, when with the getting of the coveted thing the zest departed. He thought he understood Philip's character, and he regarded Margaret as something worthier than to be regarded as a peak in a man's ambition. Of course Philip was older and wiser now, and it is never safe to argue from childhood's analogies. But Payne's congratulations were tinged with reserve.

Field was delighted. His romantic, theatrical soul was stirred by this plucking of success out of failure. He had for Philip that whole-hearted admiration which education and culture often draw from minds broad enough to value them, and unfortunate enough to lack them.

Characteristically, he made the marriage possible.

He gave a Savoy party, and, in a good-natured, humorous, vulgar speech, in which the kindness warmed Philip and Margaret while their very souls grated at the gross publicity, he announced his firm belief in Philip's future. As an earnest, he then and there purchased a half-share in his next play, not yet planned, still less written, paying for it by a fat check made out on Philip's back as a desk, while the people at fifty tables shouted pleased encouragement. He did not cut the Gordian knot of the writer's difficulties so much as stab it to shreds with a fountain pen.

The brilliant room was a blaze of lights. Pande-



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it banged the door Mr. Chuff was about to enter, after a peculiarly hard day.

“ ‘E never told ’is love,  
But let concealment, like a worm or a bug,  
Feel for ’s damaged cheek.’

That’s Peter,” she concluded, with a lugubrious air.

“Not ser much o’ yer worms an’ bugs, Ma,” growled Chuff. “Go ter sleep.”

Mrs. Chuff was wrong. Peter was best man, and made a capital speech. But it must be recorded that, as the train pulled out of the station on its way to Lorne, he felt that poignant stab again, and realized that with the hurrying, fussy, important train was departing something he had counted on with irrational certainty. He had never imagined Margaret out of his life. It came upon him with a horrible sense of bereavement that henceforth there were to be no secret desires, no unexpressed hopes, no delightful day dreams. It was only a game, as make-believe as childhood’s pretences, but the game must stop. Not the engagement, not even the wedding, not the laughing farwells on the platform brought the cold reality home. It was the ugly, squat, red-disked van bringing up the rear of the departing train that was really pushing Margaret away from him.

Lorne lies at the foot of a mountain, which it has to clutch tight to prevent itself slipping into the Southern Ocean. It possesses an extraordinary charm for newly-married people, and as it is human nature to wish to recapture delight, its hotels are filled with folk who include, in addition to the superlative of bliss just attained, the slightly less rapturous comparative of last year, and the more decorous and reasoned positive of the severely normal.

Philip fiercely resented this. The indecency of the presence of others in his Paradise shocked him, and he talked of going on further to the solitude of Apollo Bay. Margaret laughed at him, and compromised by taking long tramps with him up the Erskine, or along the cliffs to the headlands through which the wooded

Cumberland slips through golden sands to the sea. There he could try and put into words the feelings that flooded him. He peremptorily forbade her to talk of work.

"I have worked for years," he said, "and there are more years of it ahead. This is going to be play-time, if I never play again."

"But we've been here a month," she reminded him, "and Field will want to see his play begun, at least."

"He hasn't bought me," said Philip. "He'll get his play, but in my own time. Hang it, I'm just learning you by heart, and you talk of sending me to hum-drum work."

"Perhaps it is foolish to learn me by heart," she argued. "You can discard the text, when you know it thoroughly."

"Not this text," he told her, and picked her up bodily, with a strength she always admired. "There are too many different readings. You are as elusive as a will-o'-the-wisp. Just when I have you under my hand you slip away from me. Do you really love me, Margaret?"

"Haven't I proved it?" she asked.

"Don't you know that sometimes a man would sooner be told in words than have it proved in deeds? Tell me that you do. It's a tune I could never tire of."

His eyes, tender and sincere, held hers. And it was hers that dropped.

"But you know it, darling," she said. Somehow it was hard to say just the words he was craving to hear.

"I suppose I do," he admitted; "but sometimes I feel that I only have captured part of you. There's something in you that won't meet me. I won't be satisfied with a dole, Margaret. I want to hold you sometimes so that in one great flood of love your whole personality will merge itself in mine. That is marriage."

"We're learning each other, Philip. Don't try and get into Class Two before I'm ready for you. Let's go up the school together."

"I want that, too," he said. "But don't hide from me. Let's meet each other right out in the open."

She jumped up from his knees.

"Catch me," she challenged, and ran down the yellow sand to the surf. He was after her like a flash, and caught her up just where the big waves broke in a rainbow shower. They had both been bathing. The water frothed in white lace around them, and he held her triumphantly up.

"Margaretta—a pearl," he shouted, and bore her up the beach. Her lips trembled into happy smiles, and soon their laughter, young and joyous, was ringing out, and the great cliffs were repeating it with pleasant echoes. Youth was answering youth, and reservations and doubts had a bad time of it.

There was little more talk of work. He made delightful love to her. When she remonstrated, he retorted that he was planning the play.

"Don't interrupt me," he said. "All this time I'm thinking out a plot."

"Precious little thinking out you do," she retorted. "You talk to me all the time."

"I'm modelling the heroine on you," he explained, "and I must study my heroine, surely."

So in laughter and nonsense, the attempt to work came to an end.

The position was quite understandable. Margaret was an intelligent, many-sided woman, beautiful in a way that owed nothing to mere vapid regularity of feature. She was not all on the surface, and to Philip the sudden gift of such a rich, complex study was unsettling to his ordinary work. Continually new aspects appeared of this delightful girl who had married him, and still there seemed to be others not yet discovered. No wonder she absorbed him.

Margaret insisted at last on a return. She wired Aunt Bessie to prepare the house for their home-coming. Mrs. Redford, with a generous feeling that Mrs. Lee might like a share in these important preparations, stopped her carriage in Domain Road and waited while

the dowager made the necessary toilet. She emerged, finally, leading the diminutive Gertrude.

"On the box," commanded Mrs. Lee, majestically, and the tiny maid put heavy boots on successive enamelled spokes of the front wheel until she arrived at the seat beside the disgusted coachman, whose "Giddap" subtly conveyed to the horses the outraged feelings which were moving their driver.

The way was short, mercifully. The house lay among smiling gardens in a quiet backwater of South Yarra, overlooking the exquisite Botanical Gardens on one side, and, away beyond them, over the green, swirling tops of countless trees, the city lay in a mystic, filmy autumn haze. At the foot of the street ran the river, with its broad flanking driveway, along which a fashionable tide of motors and smart dog carts flowed on a sunny afternoon up-stream, ebbing back to the city at sun-down.

Gertrude was set to clean and polish in the kitchen, and the musical flow of water from taps mingled with the "slop-slop" of a wet mop on linoleums. A mournful noise that accompanied the sounds of work gave token that Gertrude was happy. Every now and then the only words she really knew came out in a crescendo of dreariness:

"'Fer those in perrul on-n- ther sea.'"

Aunt Bessie worked in the drawing-room with a wonderful energy, and a cheerful flow of talk. Mrs. Lee, however, fluttered useless hands uncertainly towards the wrong thing, and finally subsided in a chair, the unequal struggle given up.

"I do hope she's a good housekeeper," she said; "so much depends on that. Philip has always been accustomed to a house going like clockwork. Not that clockwork is altogether reliable. Once we were in Switzerland and I took a fancy to one of those funny things that play tunes when you lift them up. The guide said I paid too much at the time, but I wouldn't listen. I was a headstrong girl always. That was the guide

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that robbed us afterwards at—was it Lucerne, or Lausanne? I never can remember which is which."

In an agony of recollection she tortured her memory, but it refused to give up the particulars of the historic robbery. Finally, Aunt Bessie told her cheerfully not to worry about it, as it did not matter in the least.

The curtains were up, and the whole place swept and garnished before the carriage called back again. Gertrude was singing with some vague idea of appropriateness another mournful dirge, in which she declared that "Nah ther labror's task is hoar," when at last she was summoned to the box-seat for the homeward journey.

Then there was a surprise. For a taxi disgorged Philip and Margaret, who had followed their telegram on an impulse of sudden nostalgia for the city.

Life seemed all at once to move faster. Gertrude, excited and pleased, climbed down again from her perch, to greet Philip, one of her heroes, for whom she cherished a hopeless passion. The coachman so far forgot his frozen dignity as to permit an icy smile to break the bleak surface of his face. Aunt Bessie was enveloped by a whirlwind, and found Margaret's arms hugging her enthusiastically. Mrs. Lee was affected by the bracing atmosphere, and her sluggish mind moved. She turned almost vivaciously to Mrs. Redfern, after she had kissed her son.

"It was Geneva," she reported, "and the man's name was Pierre"—a triumph of memory that flushed her with pleasure.

Once inside, Margaret did enough talking for a dozen. When she had worked along ten separate threads of conversation, she swept to the telephone.

"Is Mr. Wister in?" she asked, when she was connected. "Oh, is that really you, Peter, darling? No. 2 Contentment Road speaking. We're just back and want to see you dreffully. You must hurry."

With sparkling, excited eyes, she surged back.

"You two dears are both to stay," she commanded.

"I'm going to send Barnes for some stores, and Gertrude will cook for us, and we'll have a picnic."

For one awful minute, Barnes meditated revolt, but a delicious—"Please, Barnes, it will be so sporting of you," decided him.

"As a favor, Miss," he said, solemnly, cancelling all her marriage vows with careless disregard of her new estate. Then he nerved himself and horses to the sacrifice with a "Come up, then."

Payne was telephoned for, and a noisy, happy party sat down to a badly-cooked tea, all talking together. Gertrude bobbed in a dozen times on the flimsiest excuses.

Then Margaret had to show them the extraordinary devices for work in Philip's study.

"Built for the production of masterpieces," commented Payne. "And how goes the play?" he asked. "We laughed when we heard you were going to work on your honeymoon."

"He didn't do a stroke," accused Margaret; "but he will now. You promised, didn't you, Phil?"

"If you'll be my secretary," he made condition.

"Make your hero a cave-man, old chap. The women love that sort—you know, let him bash the heroine about and whirl her round, to teach her to love him?" asked Peter.

"Burn all the varnish off your phrases, Phil," advised Payne. "You have the real stuff underneath."

"Oh, good, we're all here. Let's be a committee," and Margaret clapped her hands.

"You sententious asses!" said Phil. "Was it you Field paid for the play? Go to. You could not collaborate to produce so much as a list of *dramatis personae*. My future programs will not bear the legend—'Written by Philip Lee from dictation.' This committee is dissolved."

"Can't we help?" wailed Margaret.

"Certainly, by allowing me to do things my own way. Take that ass Peter out before I shy this inkwell at him; and I'm going to stab the Doctor with this

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new bill-file unless he withdraws his remarks about my varnish. You mountains, laboring to bring forth mice!"

Mrs. Lee followed it all with a vague smile. But on the last word she hung, and swung herself into the talk.

"Mice," she said. "We had a plague of the wretched little creatures at Deniliquin. What *was* it your father used, Philip? Something beginning with S. You ought to have a bottle of it in the house, just in case. Or was it a bottle? No, you burnt it in their holes."

"We'll order some in, Mater," Philip assured her, solemnly, and he turned to Payne.

"I'm not sure that I'm going to start work right away. My wife and I are just teeming with ideas. It seems foolish to shut yourself up to write about others, when the world is holding out both hands to you."

"Depends a good deal on whether the world is holding out full hands or empty," said Payne.

On the step, he lingered with Margaret. Philip had walked to the tram with Peter, and the carriage had departed a full hour ago.

"Make him work," he said.

"But he wants to play," she said.

"I know—with you. Don't let him. Drive him to his work. I know Philip. Keep him guessing, Margaret. Don't give him everything you've got at once. He's still a boy. Keep the toys in a cupboard, and dole them out by degrees."

"Does he get as tired of them as all that?" she smiled.

"It's human nature for us all to reach out eager hands for the unattainable. Make just a scrap of you unattainable."

She shook her head.

"I'm beginning to think that he will only get back his enthusiasm for his work, if I give him all his toys at once," she said. "I want to, oh, Doctor, I want to, for he's just the dearest thing."

"Follow your own nature, my dear girl," he said, with a grip of the hand; "if you get what you deserve,

the future will have nothing but good. But get him to work. He's—a bit—a bit——," he hesitated.

"Never mind the missing word," she broke in. "I'll train him so that he'll be the prize husband. That's better than being the celebrated playwright, isn't it?"

"Infinitely," concurred Payne. "Good-night."



## CHAPTER XIX

*"Though terrors o'ertake us  
We'll not be afraid.  
No power shall unmake us  
Save that which has made.  
Nor yet beyond reason  
Or hope shall we fall—  
All things have their season  
And Mercy crowns all."*

—THE ASTROLOGER'S SONG

**W**OMAN o' the name o' Lance been 'ere twicet to-day for you, young man," was Mrs. Chuff's greeting to Peter.

He knit puzzled eyebrows. The name conveyed nothing to him.

"Spring Street, she lives," explained Ma, in that elliptical style we all affect in ordinary intercourse.

"Oh—*Lance!*" exclaimed Peter, as if it were an entirely different name, when uttered with conviction and emphasis. "What on earth did she want?"

"She said for you to go round to her place, soon's you come in; seemed a bit excited. P'raps you'd get a piece for the paper out of it, if it turns out a tragedy or something."

Mrs. Chuff could never disabuse her mind of the idea that reporters and journalists were like vultures, making a living by hanging round waiting for murders and burglaries to be committed.

Peter had "placed" Mrs. Lance as Mazie's landlady. He had noticed that Field's "girl-and-music show" was playing a season, and in a vague way had supposed that one of these days he must go and look up Mazie Sefton. He decided to answer Mrs. Lance's summons

and go round at once. Probably the girl had left without paying her board.

The landlady opened the door.

"Ho, it's you," she began, while he was still on the step. "That young lady of yours is pretty bad."

There was an allegation wrapped up in the words, which Peter did not trouble to deny.

"Bad? What's wrong?" he asked, in real concern. He had put his hat on the marble-topped table in the hall.

"I dunno, and I can't afford a doctor. It's law that a person who sends for a doctor 'as to pay 'em, if the patient don't. Miss Sefton, she comes back from Sydney at the beginnin' of the week, an' takes 'er ole room. Quiet an' well-be'aved she is, I will say; but if I'd ha' known she was sick'nin' for somethin', I'd h' seen 'er further before I'd ha' let 'er in. Not that I'm a 'ard woman, but I got my livin' to make, same as others, an' I can't afford to 'ave people gettin' sick on me, p'raps dyin' on me."

"Surely it's not as bad as that," Peter said.

"Well, she's callin' out crool. Go up yourself, if you ain't afraid of catchin' it. That's jest the point. If it is, I'll 'ave all me other roomers leavin', an' dodgin' off to new places. It's pretty 'ard."

"You'll have to get a doctor at once," commanded Peter. "I'll be responsible for the money."

"An' well you might be, seein' she's your young lady," smartly the landlady riposted. "Come to that, 'sfunny you lef' 'er a week without callin' roun'. It was on'y yesterday I ses to the girl in the kitchen, 'me noble's 'ad a tiff with 'er ladyship,' I ses."

Peter pushed past the too voluble woman and ran up the stairs. The way was familiar to him. The frowsy bedroom no longer affected him. Chorus girls have only the streets and parks to receive their friends, if they are debarred from the use of their bedrooms as reception-rooms. He had come to have a real regard for Mazie, whose frankness and amiability had won on him.

He opened the door. The kewpie had long given place to newer gifts. A fancy basket, whose handle displayed an immense bow of blue ribbon and the soiled card of the donor, had pride of place. The only chair held an untidy mass of crumpled crêpe-de-chine and lace. A silken mob-cap perched drunkenly on one of the varnished minarets, a pair of which supported between them a cheap, swinging mirror.

So much Peter noted, as he closed the door softly, and approached the bed.

The bedclothes, in all their unfresh repulsiveness, were tumbled and twisted. A white quilt had slipped to the floor, and upon it lay a hot-water bottle, with a pillow hard by. He picked up the last, and, as he straightened himself, two fever-bright eyes regarded him in the gloom.

Mazie recognized him, and smiled. There was no amusement in the smile.

"That you, Grandpa?" she said, weakly. "Oh, Lord, I do feel rotten. Florrie left. Poor kid, she's got to think of herself."

"She's a selfish little beast," Peter said, savagely, feeling a tenderness for this desolate, abandoned girl, whom it was nobody's business to succor.

"Oh, she's not so dusty," Mazie defended, but there was no strength left in her to make any vigorous fight for the defaulting Florrie. Peter had begun to have some knowledge of these queer stage associations, and recognized that they carried no obligations of ordinary friendships.

"I've told Mrs. Lance to get a doctor in," he said, clumsily straightening the bedclothes, and making the pillow as uncomfortable as only a man can.

"I'm a bit better this evening," Mazie informed him. "But I had a fierce time last night, yelling away at the top of my voice and——," her words began to trail off, and she closed her eyes.

"You ought to have a woman to look after you," Peter said. He felt his own inability to do more than

sympathize. A sudden thought came to him. He got up.

"Don't you move," he ordered. "I'm off to get a doctor myself. And I'll get something that'll be a hundred times better than a doctor."

"Oh, I'm all right," whispered Mazie, with dry, cracked lips, "if you'll just be a dear and pour me out some water. I'm as thirsty as a camel."

He dashed to a surgery, spoke to a nurse, and left, happy in his ignorance that he had peremptorily summoned to the bedside of a poor chorus girl a specialist who sat in a surgery for three scant hours a day, and received fees that gave him an income greater than that of a Prime Minister.

A telephone booth swallowed him up. He providentially remembered Margaret's pride in her newly-installed telephone.

"Hullo," he said, when he had got his connection. "Is Philip Lee at home?"

Margaret's voice replied.

"Oh, it's Peter," she recognized. "I don't know where you'll find Phil. He went out with Mr. Field in a gorgeous motor-car. But whether north, south, east or west, I can't say."

"Doesn't matter. It's really you I want," said Peter. "There's a good Samaritan job waiting for you, if you can leave the wonderful house for an hour. I want your advice on a case."

"A case? What sort of a case?" came her voice in reply.

"Girl—sick—nobody to look after her," Peter jingled. "Tell you all about it later. Hop into a tram and have some food at Ma Chuff's. If Phil's away, there's no sense in dining alone. I'll take you home again."

"All right. I'm coming, if it's only to satisfy my curiosity," she laughed.

After a hasty meal, Peter hurried her off to Spring Street. Mrs. Lance opened curious eyes, as she saw a lady.

"Doctor been?" asked Peter.

"Yes, 'e 'as, an 'e's ordered all sorts o' muck I can't cook in my kitchen," said Mrs. Lance. "'W'y on earth can't people go off to 'ospitals w'en they feel themselves comin' on sick? It beats me. We pay enough to keep 'ospitals goin', I must say. W'y not use 'em occasional?"

"Did he say what was wrong?" inquired Peter, dis-regarding this eloquence.

"'E said it would declare itself before long," was the reply, "an' in the meantime she mustn't be moved, an' she ought to 'ave a nurse. Oo'll pay a nurse, an' oo'll pay me for 'er keep, that's what I want to know! I ast the doctor, but 'e jest pushes by with 'is little black bag, an' jumps into a motor-car. Motor-car! An' well 'e might, not bein' ast to keep nurses an' cook invalids' messes for charity."

Mrs. Lance had been solacing herself with artificial comfort, and it had made her voluble and pessimistic. Peter led the way upstairs, but Margaret turned to the landlady.

"I'm sure it is hard for you to have sickness in a boarding-house, but I'll see that it is made as easy as possible, and of course you will be paid for your trouble."

"Well, that's the sort o' talk I like to 'ear so long's it ain't jest talk," said Mrs. Lance, with enthusiasm, tempered with caution. She looked admiringly after Margaret, as she went upstairs. Then she returned to the kitchen, appeased, but inclined to doubt. Faith in human promise is not strengthened by the maintenance of a caravanserai.

Mazie's head was turning from side to side, in the damnable iteration of fever. Her eyes were closed, and she appeared to be restlessly sleeping. Margaret turned to Peter.

"You can do nothing, Peter. I'm going to stay, if you'll slip out to Number Two and tell Phil I haven't eloped with the baker. I left no message."

"But you can't sit up all night," remonstrated Peter.

This was more than he had designed. The complete assumption of command staggered him.

"We must get a nurse in," he objected. "Your own health won't stand this sort of thing. Phil will be——"

"Not nearly as much as I will be if you don't go and do what I tell you," she said, severely, her voice pitched low to avoid waking the sleeper.

Peter recognized finality when he heard it. He went. Margaret tidied the slovenly room, and folded the flimsy garments. Then she settled herself in the chair, and prepared for eventualities, previously examining the directions on the medicine bottles, which had been sent up from a neighboring chemist.

So this was one of Phil's friends! She had known him long before Margaret had met him. She had been an important unit in his daily life. It gave her a standing claim on Philip's wife. She never dreamed of any more intimate tie than stage associations would create.

Slowly the night dragged on. The fever mounted, and Margaret was roused from a fitful, worried slumber by the sound of a high-pitched voice. She conquered the terrible desire to sleep through the interruption, and forced herself to rise.

Mazie was talking, but a glance at her flushed face was sufficient to indicate that it was but the wandering talk of delirium. The sound of that laughing tone, followed by heart breaking complaints, was eerie in the deep silence of the sleeping house.

Margaret whitened. A feeling of something akin to repulsion seized her, but she overcame the disgust that was only momentary, and bathed the girl's face with eau-de-cologne. Her babbling went on, and Margaret grew heartsick, and longed for the help that morning would bring. She was paying for her offer of help, paying as Peter could never have suspected. For out of that jumbled, incoherent stream of talk came scattered sentences, which at first possessed no meaning or significance, but which soon made all too clear what part this girl had really played in her husband's existence.

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Mazie stared at her a moment. She was endeavoring to take in the information.

"So you're his wife," she said at last. "Of course we heard he was married. He—he was right, then."

"Right?" repeated Margaret, puzzled.

"Yes. He used to tell me about a woman who was waiting for him somewhere—a woman like you, and he always said he wanted to be decent when—you—came along. And you came—all right. Well, good luck to him. He treated me white. That's something for you to be proud of. They don't make 'em much better than Phil Lee."

It was all she could do for him—she had only her loyalty to give. Little fool that she had been, little idiot that she was now, with her easy kisses, and her ready venality, she had known what many women go through life lacking—real, unselfish love for a man.

Two tears pushed from under her puffed eyelids and rolled sluggishly down her cheeks—tears of weakness perhaps, tears of remembrance surely. Philip was happy in that there was only kindly recollection behind them, not the least atom of bitterness.

Margaret felt all the helplessness of pity that is shorn of effective action.

"You looked after him when he needed it most," she whispered. "I won't forget that. He's a lucky man whom two women care for."

Mazie put out her hand, and touched Margaret's.

"I never did him any harm," she whispered. "He was always waiting for you."

"I know," Margaret assured her. And believed it.

## CHAPTER XX

*"I do not look for holy saints to guide me on my way,  
Or male and female devilkins to lead my feet astray.  
If these are added, I rejoice—if not, I shall not mind.  
So long as I have leave and choice to meet my fellow-kind.  
For as we come and as we go (and deadly soon go we!)  
The people, Lord, Thy people, are good enough for me."*

—A PILGRIM'S WAY

**M**AZIE had come and gone, once more well enough to take the road.

The play was making little progress. Philip was only working by fits and starts. Margaret and only Margaret, held his interest. She scolded him, and he laughed. He delighted in showing her off, and carried her everywhere. Their nights were always engaged, either in Society, or with their own intimate circle in the wonderful house.

When at last he did settle down to half-hearted work, he was disappointed in the result. In a moment of sacrificial clarity, he destroyed the whole of the Act he had written.

"They won't do what I want them to," he complained to Margaret. "I hear them talking, but in the moment it takes to transcribe on the typewriter, their conversation drops dead, as though they were conscious of an eavesdropper. I'm a joke as a dramatist."

Margaret went to him. His arms were around her on the instant.

"Let's cut the whole thing to-day, and take a spin down to Black Rock," he said.

"We were out nearly every day last week," she reproved him. "I've simply given you every minute of my time. It's not good for your work."

It was true. She had yielded to his constant urging,



and gradually he had absorbed her every instant. Her being was at last, by his very importunity, being merged in his, just as he had wished.

"What goes wrong with the play people?" she asked.

"They burble, instead of saying the flashing, biting things I invent," he said. "Here, read that—two sheets that were saved from the wreck."

She took the sheets.

"H'm! I don't like it, darling; but I don't think the fault's in what they say. It's what they are. I can't see them. Do you know what I mean?"

"Perfectly. Same old story. 'Pon my word, Margaret, I think you and Payne must be right. I know you think I can't draw human beings. As soon as I come to lick their conversation into shape, and give it a bit of sparkle, they die."

"P'raps it's because ordinary people don't sparkle that they seem unreal, dear. Why not use everyday talk, such as ordinary folks use? We don't land out an epigram every time we speak."

"No, but hang it all, you can't be commonplace in a play," he objected. "I'll admit that a dialogue between common folk must appear to be as dull as themselves, but it must only be appearing. The moment an author really gets dull it's all up."

"But, Phil—I—don't you—can't you see that common folk are not dull? I mean—take our butcher. He's in love with Hetty. She looks out for him through the kitchen window for a full half-hour before he comes——"

"My dear, good girl, you're not going to suggest to me that the poetic love of a butcher and a kitchen-maid will make good material for a play," he broke in.

"It's not a question of a play, but of dullness. Hetty simply glows, when she hears the cart, and the butcher——"

"Looks sheepish," he interrupted. "He would. Idyllic. Calls her his little lamb."

"Oh, well, if you're not going to be serious," she said, offended.

"Proceed, darling. I pant to hear more of the butcher's heart." He got up and put his arms about her, smiling into her eyes.

"Well, all I want to say is that I'm as interested in them as I could possibly be in a clever man talking epigrams to a clever woman. There's only one way to make love, and that's as old as the hills. Shaw and Oscar Wilde may do it more cleverly than the butcher, but if their method interests their heroines any more than the butcher's does Hetty, I—I'll be hanged," she finished, emphatically.

"Then I make this concession," he made amends. "To-morrow morning as ever is, I'll observe the butcher and the maid, and will tell you if I find the performance dull. What time does the curtain go up on this pastoral?"

"He comes at ten," Margaret informed him; "but I won't have you spying. Think if it was us—we; no I will say us, it sounds much better."

"All right. When you're so defiant of literature as to fly in the face of English grammar, it's time for me to retreat."

He kissed her hurriedly.

"Pop off. I've got an idea." And she forthwith popped.

In her groping way Margaret had found his chief weakness as a playwright. He had developed, in his actor's life, a sound knowledge of construction. His own untaught genius had supplied him with a keen sense of dramatic values. But he lacked, and woefully lacked, that sympathy with people, unless they were the people who moved in his own set, which can detect an idyll in a ragman's romance, a poem in a fish shop. As Payne had remarked, he had to burn off the varnish from his work, before its great qualities could be seen. There is very little commonplace in life, to the seeing eye. Drama lurks in the meanest existence, and beauty may co-exist with evil.

Philip was to learn this, just when disgust at repeated failure was wearing on him, and reacting on Margaret.

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He had taken the finished play into Field, six months after their marriage. The comment of that gentleman was characteristically terse.

"No guts!" he had said. It was even so. Situations in plenty there were, laughter in its proper place, but subordinated to the serious theme, good dialogue and snappy curtains, but it was "well-made," and nothing further.

"Take it away, and get some pep into it, old man," said Field. "Better still, let it alone, and start on another. I want to feel as I read the — thing—My God, I know that man; I've met that woman, or someone — like her. See what I mean? That woman of yours in the play is Amanda's sister who's married into the — nobility. Keep at it. You've got it in you, and once you strike the real thing, you'll make a big hit."

Philip took the rejected manuscript, and in a state of utter dejection walked into the street. It was a mood that visited him rarely.

Someone slapped him violently on the back. He came to earth with a jerk, and saw, regarding him with an amused smile, a man in clerical garments. For a second he failed to recognize him, and then he knew.

"Old John Weir!" he cried, his dejection gone at once. He had the happy faculty of putting worries on one side, until they called for solution.

John Weir, whom he had not seen since he had left Queen's nearly four years before, shook his hands with an energy that attracted amused attention from passers-by. Weir apparently was the same energetic creature who used to discover texts in the Bible that knocked the bottom out of Methodism, and Philip smiled at his enthusiasm.

"What are you doing in this wicked city?" he inquired. "Aren't you living an innocent pastoral life in the bush, saving infrequent souls, when they can spare you the time from their cows?"

"Me? In the country! I've got the toughest set of souls to shepherd in Australia. They're always break-

ing down the fences and scattering abroad. Generally, though, I know where to round them up, when mustering time comes—the Melbourne Jail.”

“Why, what in the world are you doing?” demanded Philip.

“Got an hour to spare?” Weir asked, by way of reply.

“Two. I’m a poor devil of a writer with nothing to write,” was the response.

“Come with me, and I’ll show you what I’m doing and give you something to write about,” Weir promised.

“I’m on. Where does the pilgrimage lead?” asked Philip.

“God knows,” replied the parson, soberly. “To Little Bourke Street in the first instance.”

Around this unsavory district various religious organizations operate. Weir represented the Methodist Church Mission, which does notable social work here.

He and Philip climbed to the former’s room, which was situated at the top of a building, on the ground floor of which a Chinese merchant carried on the sale of bananas by day and joined to that innocent trade a more lucrative one in opium, by night.

Philip looked round him with interest. Then he turned to Weir.

“Any doubts come to trouble you here?” he asked.

“Doubts? I never worry my head about Higher Criticism now. I’ve got my job, and hair-splitting isn’t part of it.”

He spoke with the same old forthright abruptness as in his College days, every now and then using a crude, but gripping, phrase that struck almost like a physical blow.

“Well, you look as if saving souls agreed with you; trained to the hair you used to split, I should say.”

“I’m not saving souls; don’t run away with that idea. I’m saving bodies. I don’t bother about the soul. God is quite capable of taking care of that part of the business.”

"But I thought bodies were as nothing in comparison. You're upsetting all my ideas."

Weir frowned.

"We all make a God in our own image. It's a necessity, I suppose. That's why you find parsons of some of the straiter sects teaching their people to worship a God, who is strung round with the little, dry, shrivelled souls these fellows have saved for Him—much the same idea of scalp trophies on a wampum belt. All the pleasure of life must be banished; all the sap must be squeezed out of the soul before it can be presented. I'd as soon worship a sacrificial joss as that God."

His very vehemence was impressive. Philip was inclined to draw him.

"The God of the Roman Catholics must be liberal enough to suit you, Jack."

"Oh, I've no quarrel with them. But they've made their God in their own image, just like the rest of us. He takes his orders from the Pope, when it's all boiled down. That follows from their belief that the Scriptures are progressive Truths, which the Pope and the Cardinals may add to as it pleases them. God only wrote the back numbers."

"It's easy to interpret you Diety then. Down-right, plain-speaking, decisive, down on evil like a thousand of bricks," commented Philip.

"That's where you're wrong, Lee. I don't admit such a thing as unqualified evil. Do you remember little Le Mestre laying down the same law? I thought he was a metaphysical ass. But it's true, true as gospel.

"I've found out a lot of things here," he went on, in response to Philip's interested nod. "I've known a burglar who hated shams and hypocrisy and lies in all the ordinary relations of life most sincerely; he had virtues that would have graced a Lord Mayor, and the kindly heart of an Archbishop. His one visible blemish was a passion for breaking and entering.

"A murderer may quite possibly have the virtues of fidelity and generosity and a host of others, a furious, ungovernable temper being his one grave fault. I have

a bad temper; I can only pray that God sends no overwhelming temptation while my brain is clouded by passion."

The doctrine he preached with such emphasis was trite enough. It has presented itself to most intelligent people. Only the most rigid refuse to recognize its truth.

But it struck Philip with peculiar force. To him black was black, and white, white. The twilit gray did not exist. In his writing, a villain was a villain in Act One and remained one to the fall of the last curtain. Sharp lines of demarcation separated his good from his bad, and it was merely a reflex of a certain rigidity in his own nature, which his amiability generally kept hidden.

That Weir should throw up a more or less comfortable billet in a suburban church and accept the hardships and ugliness of a slum impressed him tremendously. He was anxious to get at the psychology of such an act. He considered he had found it in a fanatic regard for salvation of human souls. But this Weir had repudiated. Now he was forced to shift his ground. It was a passion for humanity, very much in the rough, that was dominating the parson. What interest had this dirty, evil, ill-looking ruffianism for a cultured man like Weir, that it did not possess for himself?

He asked Weir to explain.

"It's hard. Our minds don't march, and I've got to find language you'll understand. But it's like this. My God is an orderly, logical, reasonable Being. He must have a purpose, in sending us spinning through space, all handicapped, but some handicapped out of the race, if their only chance were in this seventy year stretch.

"Well, there's a working hypothesis. Now I don't think there's any satisfying God short of something very like perfection, and only God knows when that will come. But there are a good many pretty far on in their class. These re-incarnationists have a good deal of reason for their hope. It may well be that handicaps, apparently unjust, have been imposed for good purpose

in a previous incarnation. I don't want to dogmatize. But put it that human souls may be thousands of years old in some cases, and one year old in others. I don't fret about the old souls. They're well on their way. My concern is with the newer ones, so far as I bother about them at all, which I don't really. But in these poor devils, floundering in ignorance and wretchedness in this slum, and elsewhere in their millions all over the world, constrained by their very natures to make hideous mistakes, I see the raw material of angels. That's why I get up each morning tingling with an excitement that is more pleasure than pain. I'm watching human stuff in the rough. I'm helping it to better physical standing ground. Someone else will take on the work when I go, and at least something will happen, something logical, something reasonable."

"When they die, do you mean?" inquired Philip.

"Lord, no! Don't think for a moment that those poor wretches after a maudlin deathbed repentance, born of terror of extinction and desire to please a parson, as an officer of the God they're told they are soon to meet, are by that emotional experience fitted for eternity. Not as I see it. They've left Class One, that's all."

"But if you're right, other parsons are wrong," objected Philip.

"That's quite likely," said Weir, calmly. "Of course, they don't always say what they really think. Many of them are not the anæmic creatures they pretend to be. I wouldn't talk to a congregation of milk-and-water-fed people as I have to you. Now I've jawed long enough. Come out and I'll show you raw humanity."

Philip spent two hours with Weir, and visited houses, whose filthy, foul, obscene atmosphere and sounds almost turned his fastidious stomach. He mentioned the effect it had on him. Weir laughed.

"You'll make a poor writer, if Life disgusts you to that extent," he said. "You'll have to cultivate a nose that's smell-proof, my friend. It's marvelous what a

little understanding sympathy does to the olfactory system. In a while you'll only see the drama of the lives of these people and the interest of that will leave you no time for disgust."

Philip saw many contradictory things in the course of his first ramble through slum-land. A slatternly Irish woman, nursing a wailing baby, remained for him the most vivid memory. He denounced her heartlessness to Weir, who smiled.

"That kid she was nursing belongs to another woman, whom she hates like poison. The real mother cleared out. Mrs. Nolan was the first of five women in the house to offer to take the child. She'll bring her up—badly, criminally, perhaps, but that doesn't affect the splendid nature of the impulse that stirred her to adopt it."

"It's too much of a tangle for me," said Philip.

"Luckily you and I are not called on to unravel it," Weir said.

"It would help if that awful warren of houses were burned to the ground, with all the filth and misery inside it," Philip said, fiercely.

"If it would, I would cheerfully do a fifteen-year stretch for arson to-morrow, and would add murder to the crime, if I could collect the landlords and shove them inside it; but there's no remedy in that. That class of tenant would render a brand new tenement building with hot and cold water in every room and baths on each floor uninhabitable for decent folk in two weeks," replied Weir, energetically. "Slums are not a matter of housing. Misery clots together, and breeds filth and crime. It's simply up to God. By-by, old son. Look in again, whenever you want a dose of realities."

A quick smile, a warm clasp of the hand, and Weir was off with brisk steps to that awful little room in the roof.

Philip shuddered involuntarily.

As he passed over Prince's Bridge, with an impulsive jerk he tossed his play into the water. He had made



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a decision to work henceforth only with human materials for drama. Weir had discarded Higher Criticism and doubting refinements of meanings, and had come down simply to humanity. He was right. For Philip, word splitting, phrase polishing, epigram making had been what differing interpretations were to Weir. In like manner he must throw them off, and get down to bed-rock. Human conduct was relative. What a field to work in!

He turned down the Alexandra Avenue, and walked with happy, springy steps, back to the tiny home, and Margaret.

## CHAPTER XXI

*"Yes, sometimes in a smoking-room, through clouds of 'Ers'  
and 'Ums,'  
Obliquely and by inference illumination comes,  
On some step that they have taken, or some action they  
approve—  
Embellished with the argot of the Upper Fourth Remove."*

—THE PUZZLER

**P**HILIP was swept away by one of his periodic enthusiasms. He denied himself every kind of relaxation. Margaret herself took on a tenuity for him, becoming a shadow among other shades.

He was diving deep into basic passions; he was dragging the essential good out of evil nature. He was finding out for himself that "there is a soul of good in things erroneous," and with the unresting fervor of a creator, out of twisted motives and tangled desire, he was fashioning a play. It had but one aim—to show living men and women reacting to events, which with no sort of warning came crashing into their lives.

Margaret observed him with half-frightened interest. The rejection of the last play, which she had partly anticipated, with dread for its effect on him, seemed not to have touched him at all. Like the previous disaster of Amanda, it had been over-shadowed by a newer and more compelling passion.

The nightly readings, with which he was wont to try the effect of the day's work on his wife and Peter, were discontinued. He became secretive, jealously locking up the manuscript, when he reluctantly left his room.

It was during this period that he took a dislike for the ordinary social pleasures. Peter was always so handy, another self. What could be simpler than to ask the dear old chap to see that Margaret had a good

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time? Peter always had seats waiting at the theatre, for instance. Someone had to use the spare stall, and Margaret liked to see everything that was going. Wouldn't Peter be an obliging old ass and cart her along?

The Lees, in the six months of their married life, had surrounded themselves with a musical and artistic set, in which the most talented men and women of the city moved. A sprinkling of academic folk from the University circle supplemented these, and every now and then there would be a gorgeous occasion when some world famous lion would roar amiably in their company. Sooner or later every distinguished artist or musician finds his way to the Antipodes, and Margaret's Sunday suppers, at which guests did their own waiting, and all helped in washing-up afterwards, attained quite a celebrity, which attracted other celebrities.

John Fabio, who became recognized as one of the first flautists in the world; Albert Adler, whose magic violin made him no more friends than his winning personality and rich humor, clever and subtle; Esther Watson, whose airy sketches of faries held a haunting wistful beauty, which London was quick to recognize and acquire; Long, the caricaturist, now on a famous London paper; Una Burns, with her pale, distinguished beauty and exquisite hands that touched a piano into poetry, a Saint Cecilia come to life: these were only a few of the close friends who made memorable evenings, while neighbors would steal closer to listen.

Side by side with this set of splendid bohemians, more ordinary, more exigent, was Society itself. The fringes of each touched and there was a coming and going at the outer edges; but the centers were solid, without movement. Aunt Bessie insisted that they should not "lose touch" with "their own class." They laughed at her queer sense of values, but they obeyed her.

"Don't forget that Government House Ball to-morrow night, Phil," Margaret reminded him, just as he was entering his study.

He turned, a slight cloud on his face.

"My dear girl, do you think I'm going to waste time on that affair? Not much."

"But I wanted to go particularly, dear."

"Oh, Lord! Haven't you grown out of that?" It was rarely that he permitted himself a touch of irritation with Margaret. She was particularly unreal to him this morning, which had brought an idea requiring careful working out. It was as though a shadow from a blind insufficiently raised was interfering with his light. The desire to twitch it up impatiently was overmastering.

She turned away. She was beginning to realize that her husband had no room for two enthusiasms. He was beside her, with quick contrition.

"I'm a brute, beast, darling. Pals again?" He kissed her, and her anger vanished. She smiled happily.

"I don't want to worry you, old thing," she said; "but you're too much engrossed in work, and it will do you good to get out."

"Oh, I can't go, but you will. I'll fix it with Peter." He was airily satisfied that he had made the *amende honorable*.

"Peter's not asked," she said, her tone growing stiff.

"But can't Aunt Bessie ring up the Private Secretary? He eats out of her hand," suggested Philip, his mind harking forward to his idea and anxious to get away.

"I'm not going to cadge for an invitation to Government House for my friends, Philip. If you won't go, I can't. Poor Peter can't take your place everywhere." She was bitterly hurt.

He fidgeted a moment, turning the handle of his study door backwards and forwards, until the grating noise became almost unbearable.

"What's so important about this ball?" he asked, impatiently. "It isn't like you to be so keen on it. You're not a climbing tradesman's wife."

"I want a change of showing the world I *am* a wife," she flamed, stung into pettishness. "For a month I have been appearing without a husband."

"Work must come first," he retorted, with an answer-

ing flash. She walked away. It was something new to indulge in acrimonious argument with Philip, new and unpleasant.

An hour afterwards, two hands were slipped over her eyes, as she sat at some work of cutting-out.

"I can't work when I've been behaving disgracefully," Philip cried, smiling at her with affectionate eyes. "Let's scamper through the Gardens, and get up a color. We've got to be beautiful for to-morrow night. 'Who's that tall, distinguished-looking man with the lovely Mrs. Lee?' 'Oh, don't you know? That's her husband. They say he deserted her, but thought better of it and came back.'"

His mincing tones brought ready laughter to her lips, and she threw her work on one side and leaped at him.

"A good, big *spuudge*," she insisted, "and you've got to confess that you got out of the wrong side of the bed."

"I confess."

"And you'll never be cross with your only wife again, not if she plagues you ever so?"

"Never no more."

"And you'll take her to the ball?"

"To-morrow night as ever is."

"And dance with her as often as she wishes?"

"If human endurance can support it, I shall, I swear it."

"Then you're shriven and forgiven, and I *will* walk in the Gardens. Wait till I get some bread for the ducks."

Next evening she came in to him in the study, radiant and lovely in some old-gold stuff that shimmered and rippled like water.

"My word, you do look splendiferous," he praised her. "*En grande tenue!* 'Mrs. Lee looked dashing as a waterfall.' Can't you see it in the social notes? May Mrs. Lee's obscure husband kiss her?"

"Mr. Philip Lee, the well-known dramatist, may have that distinguished honor," she said, with a grave curtsy. "You're looking rather nice yourself. There's the taxi. All ready!"

On the doorstep they met Peter.

"Just a little flurry among the great and good, Peter," Phil explained. "If you think you're going to warm yourself at our fire and drink our whisky to-night, you're wrong."

"Stop your nonsense. Give me a lift as far as Government House gates, and I'll tell you as we go." Peter was evidently big with news.

"Some rather rotten doings in the Balkans," he explained. "The office thinks it's pretty serious."

"Oh, what's wrong?" they both asked, together.

"Those beastly Servians have murdered the Archduke What's-his-name and his wife," replied Peter.

"Bad luck for the Archduke! Wasn't he rather an impossible sort of bounder?" Philip asked, with the airy haziness of possibilities that most people exhibited at the news.

"Oh, him! I s'pose so. But Austria seemed to have a use for him, and if she tries to spank Serbia, Brett thinks there'll be trouble. He talks European War."

"Rot!" scoffed Philip, largely, while Margaret listened, and thought how right he was. "European War be damned! These old women of scaremongers ought to be strung up. Read Norman Angel, my son, and when you've finished hand it on to Brett. Here, Peter, you'd better hop off. We're well into the social whirl, and I don't want my wife to be seen with a common reporter. Go off and plot out your European War, only make it a world-war while you're about it. Ink's cheap, and sensation sells."

"I'm off. If you'll tell that lordling in front to slow down, I'll hop. I'm going back to see if there's anything later."

He left them, and they entered a slow moving queue of cars, crawling up the long drive.

The State Drawing-room was fairly crowded, where Their Excellencies were receiving, and the uniforms and frocks helped to make a brilliant picture. It was to be the last ball of the departing Governor-General. None of the guests thought for a moment that many years

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would pass before that brilliant, care-free entertainment would be repeated.

It was a motley gathering, as are all these functions. Australian social life draws its inspiration from the Governor-General, and the State Governors, Government Houses in each State form focal spots, around which revolve successive circles, growing larger as they extend to the limiting circumference.

There is an inner, official circle, small in number, which with infinite dignity and solemnity gyrates around the fountain of honor. Heads of Cabinets, Ministers of State, great departmental chiefs are of this number. A wide circle contains the army of K.C.M.G.'s, C.M.G.'s, Kt.'s, and lesser members of a created aristocracy, whose titles have often been purchased, and sometimes even deserved. Most of them are political has-beens, who are flung a bauble to while away that weary time on the shelf where they have been tidied away.

"What's that A.D.C. looking at?" Margaret asked Philip, as the crowd began to thin out in the drawing-room, and move off to the ballroom. "Anything wrong with my dress?"

Philip followed her glance across the room. A tall, fair man, with the blue silk facings of an A.D.C., was frankly staring at them. As his glance met Philip's he turned it, in well-bred confusion at being discovered in an act of rudeness. Then he looked again, and an odd, flickering smile trembled on his lips.

"I'm off to the cloak-room," announced Margaret. "I'm sure I'm coming to pieces. Did you see him try to hide a smile?"

"You're all right," Philip comforted her. "I think he imagines he knows me."

The A.D.C. was standing in official attendance on Their Excellencies, who were receiving a few late-comers, preparatory to the opening, official set of Lancers. The music could be heard just commencing.

Lady Hotham moved by her husband's side across the room. She knew Margaret, who had worked with

her on Committees. As she passed, she stopped a moment and spoke.

"Sir Arthur chanced to hear your name, as you and Mr. Lee were announced," said Lady Hotham. "He would like to be presented to you."

She effected the introduction.

"Sir Arthur Lee!"

Philip bowed, and Sir Arthur smiled with a wistful sort of friendliness.

"I say—awfully glad. I'll be free after the official set. May I—ah—talk to you then?"

He moved on, after Their Excellencies, with a backward smile.

"I like him," said Margaret. "Sir Arthur Lee! I remember; he's just out from home—military secretary, I think. Is he any relation of yours' Phil?"

Philip was trying to remember what he had been told of his cousin, the son of "that woman." He had rather got the idea that the fellow was a bit of a bounder, but whether that was a fact or a deduction he could not for the life of him have said.

Margaret was busy for a time, for her programme had few gaps. Two dances she had reserved for Philip gave her an opportunity of talking to Sir Arthur, when at last he was free to make his way to them.

"I say, Mrs. Lee, I'm afraid I was staring at you and your husband like a bally ass. You see. I'm a Lee, too, and a cousin. Isn't your name—Philip?" he asked. "If it is, there's no sort of doubt about it, whether you like it or not. What?"

"Then we're cousins, all right," Philip admitted, while Margaret beamed at Sir Arthur. He looked quite young enough to mother, though he must be at least a year or so older than Philip. But his wistful shyness had gained on her at once.

He spoke in a rather pronounced English way, in what is known as the "Oxford manner." His slender, tall figure gave him an odd note of immaturity, an appealing quality that touched Philip to liking.

"By Jove, that's capital. You see, I knew you were



living somewhere about. But it's a thundering big place, what? I thought it was a bally island, don't you know—sort of thing you could sail round before breakfast. I'm an awfully ignorant sort of blighter, you know. But they tell me it's as big as the United States. I sort of gave up expecting to meet you then."

"Then you were looking for him?" asked Margaret.

"Oh, absolutely. You see, now the mater's dead, there's nobody but him; a fellow sort of likes to think he's not quite alone in the bally world, what?"

"But how did you know I existed?" asked Philip, curiously.

"Oh, from the photograph," Sir Arthur informed him, with an illuminating smile.

"The photograph!" echoed Philip.

"Oh, absolutely! The photograph. You know the one your mater sent my mater—on a pony—oh, a ripper, absolutely. You haven't altered much," concluded Sir Arthur.

"But—do you mean to say my mater——?" began Philip, lost in amazement. He couldn't tell this man how impossible it was that his mother should hold any communication with "that woman."

"Absolutely," said Sir Arthur, cheerfully, and Margaret began to count the number of times he made that poor adverb work for him.

"It's so like your mater, Phil," she put in; "in her pride of possession she simply couldn't help exhibiting you."

It was, as Margaret said, extremely like the dowager Mrs. Lee. "That woman's" son had ousted hers. She should at least see the beauty and strength she had supplanted. So, unknown to her husband, she had sent the photograph.

"I'm jolly glad she did it," said Philip. "You'll have to come over to the other side of the Gardens and see our crib, Cousin Arthur."

Margaret laughed.

"If you two ridiculous people are going to call each other 'Cousin' every time you speak, I'll scream," she

said. "I'm going to call you Arthur, and you must call me Margaret. The idea! Cousin Arthur."

"No, really; how absolutely topping of you!" Sir Arthur beamed, and his fair skin reddened with delight. "You know I haven't a friend out here. Lord Hotham has a place near ours in Essex, and he's been very decent to me. He wrote and offered me a billet, just to let me see something of the world."

"What did you do with yourself in England?" Margaret asked him.

"Oh, I was as busy as a little bee. You know what I mean—huntin' and plenty of shoots, and of course they kept me at it in the Guards," he replied.

"The Guards! How exciting! How Ouida would have loved you!" exclaimed Margaret. "A soldier! What are you, Arthur? A general?"

"Now you're rottin' me. I'm a captain, but there's dashed little chance of my ever seeing active service. That's how they came to give me leave for Australia."

Margaret's partner came to claim her, and she got up.

"To-morrow, without fail, you're to come and see me," she insisted.

"Oh, absolutely," Sir Arthur promised fervently.

"What a ripper! Isn't she, old chap? I mean to say, she's just right, lovely, and all that sort of thing. Oh, absolutely!"

## CHAPTER XXII

*"But a rival, of Solutre, told my tribe my style was outre,  
'Neath a tomahawk of diorite, he fell.  
And I left my views on Art, barbed and tanged, below the heart  
Of a mammothistic etcher at Grenelle."*

—IN THE NEOLITHIC AGE

**I**T was tea hour at the Savage Club. A babel of talk, in pleasant, cultured voices hung on the smoky air. The Social Room generally began to fill up at this time. Philip, with his cousin in tow, stopped short at the door and surveyed the crowd.

"Browne," he called. Dan Browne, who was acting as Secretary, an office always filled by a member, looked up, and then came over.

"Dan," said Philip, "my cousin, Sir Arthur Lee. I've just had him made an honorary member. Show him round for a few minutes and introduce him to some of the boys. I've got some letters I simply must get off."

Browne was a lean, solemn individual, of a gloomy habit, and a trick of moving about among the members, mute and unsmiling. But if a good-natured gibe were flung at him, the reply would come flashing, lightning-quick, and for a laughter-laden ten minutes his lambent wit would play around his opponent. His solemnity was a humorous pose, covering a nature that saw Life as a jest—a thing to poke fun at, or, on occasion, to slash with a mordant tongue. It was his task to see that the Club was kept brimming with cheerfulness. Known to, and knowing, everyone, his progress through the Social Room was a perilous affair if he happened to be in a hurry.

He smiled warmly at Sir Arthur, and held out a welcoming hand.

"It must be a great pleasure for you to meet me, Sir Arthur," he said, gravely. "I am the best snooker-player in the Club."

The visitor looked at the rather melancholy face and was at a loss. Snooker seemed a surprisingly conversational gambit. He smiled uncertainly, and looked to Philip for enlightenment, but Philip had gone.

"I'd like you to show me the game," he risked. "I'm a bally ass at all that sort of thing."

"So am I," confessed Browne; "as a matter of fact I was badly whipped last night at the final of the snooker tournament, and I'm just trying to keep my pecker up. Come on and have a look round."

The splendid room was hung round with priceless signed artists' proofs. Black-and-white original of Norman Lindsay; caricatures by Vincent and Low; portraits and cartoons with a score of great names attached decorated the walls with a unique distinction, while a frieze of aboriginal weapons lent false point to the name of the Club. A stage filled one end of the room. A mighty fire burned red in a noble fireplace, and in deep, capacious, leather armchairs members sat and talked over their tea. As Browne brought the guest within the circle, cheery greetings were flung at him.

"Here's a man you must know," said Browne, stopping before the chair of a huge, jolly fellow—more of a monument than a man. "Gecko, meet my friend, Sir Arthur Lee, cousin of Philip's." It was one of Browne's whimsicalities to adopt Americanisms on occasion. He turned to Sir Arthur, with preternatural gravity. "I'm introducing you to Gecko, whose other name is Finlay, because you're sure of a good cup of tea at three o'clock, if you wander in then and simply take the next chair. It's a tip you'll find it wise to remember."

"P'raps Sir Arthur would rather make it a whisky and soda now, Dan?" suggested Gecko.

"Oh, no, rather not. I mean to say, not now," said the baronet, whose slower mind did not quite understand this prompting of hospitality.

"Gecko's always ready for that, Sir Arthur," shouted a slight, gray-headed man, of extreme youthfulness of manner. His clean-shaven, weather-beaten face was wrinkled with the finely-graven lines that laughter makes. In his accent there was a transatlantic flavor; his speech was clipped and slurred in a pleasantly intriguing way. As he spoke he came over.

"I want to meet Sir Arthur Lee," he said, putting out a friendly fist. "For one thing, Phil is such a damn good fellow that his relatives must be first chop as well, and, for another, every visitor offers me a chance to make good at Rickety Kate. Play it! If not, we must teach you, eh, Dan?"

Sir Arthur looked at him, and smiled as uncertainly as he had at Browne's jest about snooker. He was not sure whether he was being laughed at, or whether he was being greeted with unaccustomed good-fellowship. The friendly atmosphere of the Savage Club rather puzzles the Englishman, who, with as warm a heart as his colonial brother, is more diffident about friendship.

"As a matter of fact," Browne said, slowly and solemnly, "I did not want you to meet Mr. Matson, Sir Arthur. He's rather a black sheep—American mutton—you may have noticed the flavor. Matson is one of the left-overs from the American Civil War. He came to this country several years ago in a panic, caused by apprehension as to how far the Prohibition movement would really go in the States. While whisky remains at sixpence a nobbler he is likely to remain here. You may nod to him occasionally, but very few will drink with him."

At this friendly vituperation the visitor smiled once more his uncertain smile at Matson, who was quietly filling his pipe, and listening with a critical ear to Browne's indictment.

"I'll tell you something about Dan Browne, Sir Arthur," he promised, as Dan was about to move on

with his guest. "He professes to be a teetotaller, but he was arrested for drinking on unlicensed premises the other night. It's a fact. Oh, a bad hat! A bad hat!"

"The Club solicitor is taking all that down in short-hand, Matson, and you will hear from me," Browne flung back, austere, and moved on to another group. It was not long before the shyness of the Britisher had vanished in this warmth of friendliness, and he became his natural self, simple and unaffected, the center of an interested circle.

For the talk happened to run on the trouble in the Balkans. Sir Arthur had put in twelve months as legation secretary in Belgrade, and was able to shed some light on actual conditions of that storm-center. The little knot of earnest men who had gathered round him listened with respect to his views, and several chairs were pulled closer the better to hear.

It was a new experience for the man to find that he had actually something to say which men of the world cared to listen to with interest. An understrapper in political and diplomatic departments has not much opportunity of impressing his individualistic views on his circle.

Philip joined the group, and Sir Arthur broke off his explanation.

"Here's Philip," he said. "I've been gassing far too long. Know nothing about it, really, you know. Picked up scraps, if you know what I mean. Of course, if this comes to anything, I expect I'll have to go back. Our chaps will be into this—oh, absolutely."

"Do you mean the English will fight?" someone asked.

"Well, you know we've got to do something, I mean—well, how can we keep out of it, what?"

"Hullo, more European War talk? I give a war three months," cut in Philip. "They'll all have a belly-full by that time. They always growl a lot, but there's not a bite in the whole crowd. Each one of 'em's carrying home a bone he'd have to drop to get

at the other fellow. Remember Agadir. Here comes Adler."

He hailed the violinist, who came over to them.

"Hail, great Philip, and how goes the *magnum opus*?" chanted Adler, who was forthwith presented to the visitor.

"Oh, yes, that reminds me. Where, oh, where is Simmons? I have somewhat to discuss with friend Simmons."

He smiled, as he drew from his breast-pocket a wallet, and from the wallet a newspaper cutting.

"Will somebody please wake up the well-known musical critic of the great *Daily World*? Mr. Simmons, forward, please."

Everyone knew the Puck-like humor of Adler, and amused looks were directed at him.

A fierce little man, with a German pompadour, looked up from a musical magazine he was reading. It was Simmons, who a week ago had arrived from a holiday abroad, and had not assumed his duties on his paper. He had been ragged about several blunders of which his substitute had been guilty. Adler's humor he particularly dreaded. He had watched furtively the production of the cutting.

"What do you want?" he growled.

"Merely to read one of your criticisms, my dear fellow," replied Adler, sweetly, with a delighted chuckle. "Simmons," he explained to the listening group, with the manner of a lecturer, "friend Simmons is a classical scholar, who can rarely resist the fascination of a Latin or Greek tag. Listen."

In a chanting voice he read from the cutting.

"'Mr. Albert Adler, a master of tone, and superb in his technique'—thanks, old chap. I appreciate that—'then gave a magnificent rendering of Mozart's D Major Concerta. This is, as everybody knows'—nice touch that, Sim; but what follows is better. Oh, had I but followed the Arts!—'is, as everybody knows, one of the master's *magni opi*.'

"There it is! Sim, did you know that the Grand Opi Company has been and gone and put 'Opera' on all the hoardings?"

There was a roar. Simmons' fierce little countenance was a study.

"Oh, my Gawd!" He breathed: "Bertie, did he really write that? Not *magni opi*? Show me the cutting." He took it.

"Oh, hell!" he said, solemnly. "I'll never live it down. And I kept my trip a secret, because Shelley wished me to. Everyone will think I wrote that."

"If you assure us to the contrary, Sim, old chap, we'll be forced to take your word," Adler assured him, gravely. "But it sounded so like you that——" He broke into uncontrollable laughter at the critic's expression.

"Would I have ever said you were superb, or magnificent?" he snorted. "I may know nothing of Latin, but I do know something of music." He got up, and flung his magazine into the chair. "I'm off, to knock spots off Shelley. Why in Hades didn't he read that proof?"

"Make him publish a complete *apologia*, Sim," advised Browne.

"Or, as Sim would prefer to say—*apologium*," Adler put in, slyly.

The indignant Simmons stalked to the door.

"Sim!" called Browne. The other turned.

"If he refuses, hit him on his *ora pro nobis*," Dan advised. Simmons dashed through the swinging door, and deigned no reply.

"Has anyone ordered tea?" Adler asked.

"We were waiting for you, Bertie," said Browne.

"There are eight of us."

Adler pushed the bell.

"It seems to me I always pay," he said.

"The penalty of success, Bertie," Gecko told him.

"Make mine a whisky."

"And mine coffee," Matson shouted. "Bertie, did you ever tell 'em about Baggert, that 'Tirade' man?"



"That's the boss cocky of all musical critics, isn't it? Hasn't he written reams exposing the ignorance of the whole profession? I like 'The Tirade.' It always scolds the other chappies, and tells the public there's only one artist in Melbourne, and his name is Landes."

It was Landes who spoke, a portrait painter, who could see beauty even in a Cabinet Minister. He had been commissioned by the Federal Art Advisory Board to paint the portraits of two Governors to add to the collection hung at Parliament House.

"And it's r-rather whumsical, ef ye come to luik at et rightly," Hughie McIvor said, "an' reflect that it was me that made young Landes, big man as he thenks himsel' to-day."

McIvor, a painter himself, was Chairman of the Art Advisory Board. Little, white-haired, caustic, his broad Scots tongue was generally heard lashing the Philistines. He was an iconoclast, and new schools of Art came in for constant denunciation. Young men he loved, and old and young loved him.

Music was ousted, and painters and paintings held the center of attention. A Norman Lindsay exhibition was on view.

"I know nothing much about art," a man said, "but I consider Lindsay obscene. His women are gutter-drabs, without beauty, as without virtue. As for his men, they're all satyrs."

McIvor held him with a severe eye.

"There's but yin sayin' gave aboot ye, Andrew, an' that's the grace t' admit ye know nothing about Ar-r-t. Lat me tell ye this—Nor-r-man Lundsay is th' sincerest artist in the world to-day—the very greatest black-and-white man usin' the pencil. An' ut's because he shows a' the passions an' ugliness that beset men's hairts that he's sae great. He sees deep into human nature, an' he's the fine courage tae draw what he sees, withoot makin' pretty-pretty pictures for th' great, silly populace. Australia should go on its knees to God an' thank him for the gift o' Nor-r-man Lundsay."

"Hear! Hear! Mac," came approving voices.

"Well, all the same, they're not things I want on my walls," persisted the critic.

"An' ye're richt, lad. Hang up the covers o' chocolate-boxes, as lang's they satisfy ye," advised McIvor. "I misdoot ye also would keep Smollett an' Fieldin' an' all their kind aff yer shelves. I'll tell ye somethin', Andrew. Till the world can think o' wimmin an' men and their relations with each ither withoot thenkin' ill thochts, we'll never get any forrarder. When ye only thenk o' sex for yer ain private gratification, ye'er doin' mischief. Bring things oot into the licht o' day, let free discussion cleanse them from a' the dirty accumulations o' the cellars where they've bin for generations, an' the world wull be th' sweeter. That's whut Lundsay's doin'."

"Thus saith the Preacher.' Good for you, Hughie. I suppose you approve of Morgan's article on Owen in last week's 'Tirade'?" Thus Philip.

"I don't like the man," said McIvor.

"You knew Owen, who died in London a month ago—a drunken sweep, who spent most of his time in gaol, and the rest of it rioting with street women, and writing their praises in beautifully maudlin verse?" asked Philip.

"I know of him," McIvor admitted.

"Well, Morgan has a eulogy of him in 'The Tirade.' It's worth while to read it, to see how he lashes the well-behaved portion of humanity, belaboring them with words for their beastly cleanliness. They have not the courage, according to Morgan, to get drunk and disorderly. They are smug, church-going animals, outside the artistic pale. But the ending of the article is immense—Morgan at his best. He says something like this: 'William Owen, drunkard, waster, singer of sweet songs, has justified the life that God bestowed upon him, and when his millions of detractors, who see only his debauchery, when the millions of smug churchgoers who have not the courage to taste the warm delights of sin, enter upon the future existence, they will see

William Owen, who dared to fulfil the nature given him, at the great White Throne'—or words to that effect."

"That paper would be great if it wasn't so confoundedly small," declared Matson. "Their idea that some journal is necessary to trounce hypocrisy is all right, but they have somehow got the idea that to be a law-abiding citizen is hypocrisy—that every natural man must want to be a hog, and if he refrains, it's because he's a hypocrite."

The talk switched to other subjects, and became more general. Sir Arthur said nothing, but was interested beyond measure. So this was Australia! The backblocks! He had been told in London that he would have to rough it. This Club was as good as anything he had seen. The men might have been found in any better-class institution of the same kind. The talk gave evidence of a very rich artistic existence. What wealth and culture were capable of was in evidence all around him.

In what way did these people suffer from being placed so far from the center of things? Apparently not much. The best Art, the best Music, the best Drama came to their shores, and it was more than evident that it was all supplemented by their own creation.

He was not clever, but he was quite capable of seeing that life moved here every whit as actively as in London, but with a verve and freedom which were more visible.

He had got to the point of decision. He would buy a place in the country and settle in Australia. What on earth was the use of keeping up that gaunt, ugly Essex barn? Friends were here for the asking. Hospitality was his before he asked. His lonely heart went out to these friendly fellows, who had so readily made him one of themselves.

"Is Sir Arthur Lee in the Club?" asked one of the stewards, interrupting the stream of talk. "Government House on the 'phone."

He got up and excused himself.

"I'm recalled," he announced a minute afterward. "The G.G. has just got a cable. Awfully sorry, in a

way, but—it means a chance of a scrap. I'll say good-bye." He went gravely round the circle. It was like taking leave of friends.

Philip went out with him.

"You'll find it's all a false alarm, old chap," he said.

"Oh, p'raps," his cousin said. "Do you know I think I'll come back here and settle down."

"Good man. Margaret will be on end bucked. Don't forget, that's a promise."

"Oh, absolutely," Sir Arthur called, cheerily, and the lift carried him out of sight.

## CHAPTER XXIII

*"No easy hope or lies  
Shall bring us to our goal,  
But iron sacrifice  
Of body, will, and soul.  
There is but one task for all—  
One life for each to give  
Who stands if England fall?  
Who dies if England live?"*

—"FOR ALL WE HAVE AND ARE"

PHILIP locked the door of his study with an irritable finality, as though the turned key might keep on the other side all the fuss and fury that were turning the world upside down.

All this talk of War infuriated him. How easy it was to be drawn into the seething vortex of the unintelligent opinions of his fellows! The Club had become unbearable. Sir Arthur's summons to rejoin his regiment had been only the first of many portents that had set the prophets' tongues wagging.

Daily grew the cloud, blacker and bigger, and men no longer talked the easy, pleasant things which were the index of quiet, uneventful existence. Beauty and Art were peace-time luxuries. Their mouths were full of fleet statistics, and gun calibres; they reckoned up manpower; they canvassed the value of recent inventions; they passed judgment on the men who were riding the storm in Europe.

The baleful thing intruded hatefully into Philip's normal life. It was red reality thrust ruthlessly into his petty life of make-believe—a naked sword that barred the road of his ambition. It had altered all previous standards of importance.

He felt his ego shrinking. How could the world concern itself with the shadows of imagination, in this welter of violence? His very consciousness of his own littleness but chafed his irritation.

Just as he locked his study door, so he closed his mind even to Margaret. War had not yet come, and was not coming, and he refused to listen to these wise-aces, who had already defeated Germany and her paper armies. Margaret was crazy. She had been swept off her feet by the general excitement. Well, he would not give her any chance to echo that ass Peter, who was always coming over with some cock-and-bull yarn his paper had to contradict the next day.

Margaret could not understand her husband in the least. Facts were facts, and the danger was real. It was England's peril. The deep, slow-moving stream of love for the Motherland had been rapidly swollen by countless tributary rivulets of affection, gushing from myriads of hearts, ordinarily inarticulate, until the stream had overflowed its banks. From the dull norm of toleration or pale satisfaction, every class was swept away into the deep, sweet waters of patriotism.

This is not a war-story, but no picture of the Australian *ethos* would be complete if it left out of account the wonderful phenomenon that appeared at this period—the entire heart of a dominion swelling to the fervid love that gladly sacrifices itself, and in the sacrifice finds its own nationhood.

Philip, with a mind wholly given to non-essentials, utterly misread the movement that was going on around him. His was not the attitude of a coward, who sees in events the emergence of a crisis that threatens his safety. Of physical bravery he had enough and to spare. He honestly saw in the preliminary attempts to avoid a death-struggle nothing but pretense and posturing, with a measure of chicanery, the odium of which all the participating nations shared.

Behind his locked door he worked feverishly and unhappily, as a man who works against time. He emerged for a hasty meal, with a distaste for Margaret

which was intensified by her sheaf of news, gleaned through Peter.

"He's coming over, after the paper is out," she said.

Philip rose impatiently, without a word, and went to the telephone. A moment afterwards, Margaret heard him tell Peter bluntly not to come.

"I'm frightfully busy, my dear old chap, and these days you smell of blood. It puts me off."

Then he went back to his interrupted meal.

"I heard you," his wife said.

"I meant you to," he rejoined. "There's a good deal too much harping on this miserable business. Has the whole world got to stop its work and eavesdrop on a parcel of diplomats playing a game of poker?"

"Don't you care whether England comes in or not?" she asked, in an indignant tone.

"Care! Of course I care, if it came to that. What I object to is the frantic bluff of the whole thing. How could Germany defy the world with a straw man like Austria to help her? She reminds me of a malicious beast of a man with a mastiff, which has pinned a chap in a corner—hasn't the least intention of letting the brute's head go, but is determined to see what he can screw out of the horrified spectators, before he'll call the dog off."

"But Sir Edward Grey——," she began. He laughed mirthlessly.

"Monkeys on a stick," he said. "As Grey goes up in his offers, the Germans will climb down. The string works both animals. Bluff! You'll see. It's the history of every flutter in the dove-cote for years, ever since trade became more powerful than kings. Who's going to find the money to pay millions of men in the trenches? And if that were found, who's going to do the world's work meantime? It would simply tumble to pieces, topple over by disturbance of the center of gravity. Take my word for it, in a week you'll be reading both sides' claim to a great diplomatic victory."

There were millions who shared Philip's complacent reading of the situation in those days.

Then came August the Fourth. Stunned with the shocking reversal of what he had preached so surely, Philip came out into the world of men to find that Australia was England's fighting partner, only one unit of many fighting dominions, whose existence was the stake in the big game a-playing. His theories were smashed, and from the ruins sympathy and resentment flamed hot. His work was locked away. The "play" was no longer "the thing." From his study he went straight to a recruiting office. At the door he paused, struck by a sudden thought. Then he turned incontinently on his heel, and walked rapidly to Field's office. He had forgotten his obligation to Field.

He went straight to the point.

"M.J.," he began, "I've got to enlist."

"They're not taking married men yet, old chappie. There's a big reservoir of the unattached single men to tap, and the Government don't want the extra expense of sustenance to wives and all that sort of thing until they're — well forced to it. But let's suppose that they want you. What then?"

"I've contracted to deliver you a play, and I've been paid for it. How do I stand with you? You could prevent me going if you liked."

"What the hell do you take me for?" demanded Field, "a — pro-German? To blazes with the play! But till your sort is called for, you can keep going. How's it now, by the way?"

"Half finished."

"Well, get to it. I want it. Don't you think because the lid's lifted off hell that the world's going to stop amusement. They'll want it all the more, if I'm any judge, and it's beyond any — doubt, they'll need it more. When they call for married men, you nip into a good place in the queue. Till then, remember M.J. and deliver as much of the goods as you can."

The pageantry of war was already filling the streets and the daily lives of the people. Squads of laughing, self-conscious young fellows in mufti, carrying all sorts and conditions of bags, suit-cases, and parcels, marched



along in most unmilitary order, with many a quip flung out to the crowd. Sometimes serious, set faces bore testimony to minds that saw more in the affair than a trip across the world. But, since the Australian has on occasion a good deal of the dislike of the Englishman to the display of real emotion, it is possible that much of the gaiety was superficial, and beneath it there lay a grim enough realization of what war meant and was going to mean.

All kinds of men marched together, rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief. They were of all religions. The saintly head of the great Roman Catholic Church, which in pure religion does so much good, and in politics so much mischief, was at one with the Anglican and Methodist brethren in sending his young men forth. It was not till his death, some time afterwards, that crafty, scheming brains saw the political advantages that might ensue from a division in the unity of loyalty, and deliberately put the interests and religion of Jesus Christ in pawn to reap a temporal advantage. But that time had not yet come, and with a splendid rhythmical unison, all creeds and classes swung towards the camps.

Philip watched the marching bodies with the fascination of suddenly awakened understanding. Margaret's enthusiasm had somehow quenched his. Now it stirred, with a queer scalp-lifting emotion.

"Hullo, old chap, I was coming back to look you up to-night," he heard beside him, and his cousin, Arthur Lee, who had left for England some days ago, was holding out his hand, with a cheerful grin.

"Good Lord, did you swim back?" he asked.

"The good old train, old thing. They cabled me at Adelaide to reverse. I'm to do some trainin'—the swagger British officer and the green Colonial troops, what?"

"How rotten for you!" exclaimed Philip. "You'll be out of it all."

"K. says three years. I'll probably go over with your first l'il lot. Of course I'd rather like to be with my own mob, but I don't run the Army."

"Have you got to-night free?" asked Philip; "because Margaret will be wanting you."

"Oh, absolutely. I don't report till to-morrow. I only got in two hours ago, had a tub and a change, and ran in to hear the news. They don't tell you much at Government House, I can tell you."

"Right. Just let me get on to a 'phone and I'll tell Margaret I'm bringing you out. Good Lord, I thought you were a ghost."

Margaret was equally surprised, and even more delighted than Philip. When she had greeted him, she turned to Philip.

"Peter's done it," she said.

"Done what?" he asked.

"He's gone into camp—Private Peter Wister. Dear old Peter," and quite unaccountably and suddenly she dissolved into tears.

"His mother's down here," she said, dabbing at her face.

"Why on earth wasn't I told of all this? His mother should be here with us," Philip said, indignantly.

"You—you said he—he—smelt of blood," she accused him. How could he be—sup—supposed to discover you cared to know?"

"But hang it all, Margaret, I smell of blood myself now. We all do."

"Oh, absolutely, old dear," from Arthur, with a vague idea of backing up Philip.

"And so we all should. It's the best smell in the world now," she said, with a ring of defiance in her voice. "I wouldn't want a man of mine to be so dainty as to hold his nose when a—a soldier went by."

"That's quite right—quite right," soothed Arthur, wondering where the shoe was pinching.

"Come on and let's eat. The dinner needn't spoil," said Margaret, taking his arm.

"I'm off to collect Mrs. Wister, as soon as dinner's over," Philip said, "do you know where she's staying?"

"At Ma Chuff's. Peter's room is—empty," replied Margaret.

"Well, we can 'phone her and tell her she's to come here," Philip decided. "Now, Arthur, where is all this business going to lead?"

"If Germany doesn't swallow us in a mouthful, before we can put our chaps across," said his cousin, "I think she'll go under. But it's a tremendous 'if.' I say, do you mind very much if we don't talk about the bally war? Y'see, my pals are all over there, and there's such a—such a handful of them." His face grew red, then pale. His lips were pressed to a hard straight line. "Damn them! Damn them!" he made a bitter end, and then his eyes begged Margaret to excuse him.

"Damn them!" echoed Margaret, and put down her knife and fork. She stared in front of her; away in the distance, in a dream of her own creating, she was seeing a stained dog-tent and Peter Wister seated within. Slowly she came back to the brilliant room, with its scarlet electric lights, noted Philip's matter-of-fact face, as he detailed his interview with Field, the beginning of which she had not heard, and in a calm, detached way compared the two men, the man she had married, and the man she—no, it wasn't true. The man she loved was Philip, but sometimes he slipped away from her. She looked at him attentively, and he smiled at her with affection.

What a curious phenomenon married people exhibit! In the very closest of relations, familiar with the slightest *nuances* of speech, able to interpret a desire before it is expressed, it happens in every case that there is a personality that lies in deep concealment, critical of the other's action, sharply hostile on occasion, contemptuous, unjust. And over this is spread the smooth, ordinary, everyday veneer of careful suavity.

As Philip smiled at Margaret, she was thinking deep in her mind, that he was getting sleek. In his dinner-clothes, he reminded her of a well-mannered black-and-white cat. Yet all the time she was listening with apparent interest to his description of the raw soldiers marching to camp, and smiling at his vivid phrases which brought into prominence some humorous incident

or other. Then her heart missed a beat. What was he saying?

"I'm off as soon as I've finished the play. I'll work day and night at it, and a month will see it through. Then I'll be into it."

"Good man," approved his cousin.

"Oh, Phil!" Margaret murmured. How she had longed for him to say that he too would go, would tear off those incongruous waiter's garments and get into khaki and a stained dog-tent. Now he had said it, and a quick dismay struck her heart, and paled her face. Of course he must go. Hundreds of women that very night were listening to hundreds of similar determinations. She could not be a coward. What a commonplace it all was, yet with what horribly new dismay women came to the sacrifice!

She rose. Philip hurried off to telephone to Mrs. Chuff, and arrange for Mrs. Wister to come across the river. Arthur glanced at Margaret sympathetically. He actually understood women.

"You're a sport, Margaret," he praised her. "And you ought to be proud of Phil. He doesn't say much, but he's a Briton, for all that."

"He's got to go, of course," she agreed, tonelessly. "He'll like it, too. Probably he'll develop military ambition and become a Field-Marshal."

"Oh, absolutely," he said, with enthusiasm.

They talked no more of the war. It was as if they had a secret agreement among them. Yet for all that, the shadow of it hung over them. Margaret played, and sang, but the old verve was lacking, and when she rose from the piano, and declared she couldn't manage a note more, neither of the men made any attempt to persuade her.

Then came Polly, and with Polly a most ill-behaved dress-basket, which bulged ominously and displayed portion of a dress squeezed in the enveloping lid. The restraining rope had come off, and the cabman muttered observations, as he bore it, like a huge, yellow concertina, in his arms.

She greeted them all with the utmost cordiality, and, on understanding that Sir Arthur had come that day from Adelaide, became slightly confused and welcomed him to Australia.

"I was a silly ole hen to come, and Peter will dress me down properly," she said; "but I somehow felt I better. O' course he won't be going away for ages yet, not till Christmas, Mrs. Chuff says; but still Christmas is harvest and all that, and so Father and I—here, lovey, you mustn't carry that," for Margaret had stooped to squeeze the lid of the dress-basket to the state of tightness which would allow Philip to carry it away; "no, nor your husband neither. Lord bless me, if Polly Wister couldn't carry her own basket, it 'ud be a funny thing."

She clasped it in her arms, and followed Margaret to the bedroom, her voice going cheerfully all the while, sometimes breaking off the main theme of Peter, without a change of tone, to exclaim on the unusual beauty of the curtains or furniture. Then Margaret left her to "tittivate" a bit, as she said. She talked away still, and emerged, with the words—"so Father said he guessed he could manage after all, and I'd better go if I was so set on it. And here I am," she concluded, with a wide smile.

Philip brought her over to a comfortable chair by the fire and made much of her, until she was beaming all over with pleasure. Sir Arthur's title made no other impression on her than to imbue her with a fixed idea that he must be a friend of the King. She repeatedly asked him questions which only an extreme intimacy with the Royal Family would have enabled him to answer.

"That's one thing I got a good memory for. I could tell you the old Queen's children and who they married and when they died," she boasted. "I will say I liked the old Queen; not that King Edward wasn't a good King. He was, and I'll give him his due, but give me Queen Victoria. I had a sock that belonged to her. What became o' the other I couldn't say, I only

saw one. Is King George a pleasant man to get along with?" she asked, turning to Arthur.

"Oh, absolutely," replied that nonplussed young man. He had already told her he did not enjoy the King's friendship, but she passed over his denial, and assumed a high degree of intimacy.

"I'm not surprised," she said. "I saw him when he was out here, him and his wife, if you can call a Princess a wife—sounds wrong, somehow—and he looked to me a kind, biddable sort of man. Now he wouldn't be fighting in this war, I suppose?"

"Oh, no, rather not—I mean to say, he's got generals to do all that sort of thing," explained Arthur.

"I suppose Peter'll see him. Mrs. Chuff says he's almost sure to. Well, it'll be nice. I don't suppose the war will last long. England always wins very quick. Peter won't be much good. It's George that's the good shot. But he can't go till the harvest's in, what with one thing an' another, an' Jim being poorish with sciatica. My word, you'd be surprised to see the crowd that's goin' from up our way."

She turned to Sir Arthur again.

"You wouldn't have come across Alec McIntyre in London, by any chance?" she asked genially.

Arthur shook his head.

"'S funny. He went over there a good five years ago. He used to make mud animals. His mother whacked him for it, and, would you believe it, over in London they pay him for doin' it, only he makes 'em out of something that lasts longer'n mud. Well, Alec sent a telegram to his father sayin' he was going off to fight. An' the funny part is his two brothers on the station went to enlist the very day the wire come, so there's a place'll go short-handed. Jim told George he'd belt him, big an' all as he is, if he dared to go before harvest, so there you are."

Her pleasant voice rolled on, with its small-beer of news. Margaret's face wore a tender smile, as she listened to the chatter, which, inconsequential as it was, revealed the fact that the country lad was as forward in

offering his life as his town prototype. She visualized a reservoir of manhood, into which were being poured streams of youth from north, south, east, and west. The drama of one of her stories struck Philip, and his eyes shone.

"That was a funny caper at Gheringadar," said Polly, and laughed reminiscently.

"What was that?" asked Arthur.

"It'll be something for you to tell the King, when you get home," she said. "Some fellows—we know 'em well, an' Jim's laid one of 'em over his knee for takin' their dogs among our sheep, Jenkins the name was"—she gave Arthur the information impressively, for possible transmission to His Majesty—"they got the idea it would be a good thing to enlist, and they asked a few o' their pals if they was on. You know what boys are. A few of 'em got together and they hatched the rummiest scheme. They got fifty fellers in Gheringadar alone, and they all humped their blueys and tramped to the next place—Gindara. One of the Jenkins boys hops on to an old wagon near the market an' invites all the chaps who want to enlist to join 'em, as they was marchin' right to Sydney, hundreds o' miles away.

"They's no stoppin' them fool boys when they get a mad idea. Off they go, with twenty more Gindara boys, givin' 'em no more time than to catch up a bite an' kiss their Mas, an' they play the same trick at Carstairs. Then folks began to get wind of it, an' come out to meet 'em. They're at Moy Moy when I left yesterday, an' a hundred mile to go, an' they got six hundred chaps singin' along the roads. Each town they come to, they find the people ready with food for 'em, an' the lads all set for to join 'em. Mad! They're a crazy lot."

Philip turned with shining eyes to Arthur.

"The Germans will have their work cut out to beat chaps like that," he cried.

"Oh, absolutely," agreed Arthur, warmly. "By Jove, I must tell the G.G. that, Mrs.—er—Wister.

And I'm pretty sure he'll think it worth while to tell the King. My hat! How absolutely ripping! I'll tell you what, Phil, I'm glad I've got fellows like that to train."

"But what a crazy thing to do," said Mrs. Wister.



## CHAPTER XXIV

*"Here is my heart, my soul, my mind—the only life I know—  
I cannot leave it all behind. Command me not to go!"*

—THE CENTURION'S SONG

*"He must go—go—go away from here!  
On the other side the world he's overdue.  
'Send your road is clear before you when the old  
Spring-fret comes o'er you  
And the Red Gods call for you!"*

—THE FEET OF THE YOUNG MEN

THE new play was finished in three weeks, but at a cost. Three weeks of unresting labor, so absorbing that even the din of war preparations hardly interrupted it; so tense that sleep was, for the most part, impossible amidst the riot of ideas that clamored to be reduced to something like kempt order before morning.

Philip wrote at white heat, under a painful stress of feeling, and far into the night Margaret heard his typewriter going. The effect naturally revealed itself in jangled nerves. Preoccupation would suddenly change to nervous temper. Margaret words had no meaning for him, presenting themselves to his over-wearied mind as fresh dialogue that had to be typed; the infernal clicking of the ghostly typewriter keys would beat upon his ear for endless, wakeful hours.

Peter had come one day, big and healthy, and proud of his corporal's stripes. Margaret was looking worn and anxious. In the study a ceaseless "clickety-click" proclaimed that Philip was not on view to visitors. As she looked at Peter's cheerful, sensible face, a great witsfulness seized her. She thought of that far-off

house in Contentment Road, about which she had boasted to Peter. The thought struck him at the same time.

"You're not happy, Margaret," he accused. "You're breaking Rule One. Do you remember? The sun must always shine in Contentment Road."

"Dear old Peter! Fancy you thinking of that. How young I was!"

"It's still Contentment Road," he reminded her.

"Yes, but Number Two," she said.

"What difference does that make?" he asked.

"It's on the opposite side of the road," she told him.

"The sun doesn't reach it till the afternoon. It's only a matter of a little waiting."

She smiled at him bravely, but he did not smile in return.

"The War is going to make a lot of difference to that Road," he said. "I suppose we're fools to think it's going to hit others, and miss us. Phil is as clever as he can stick, and he'll probably be made to take a staff job, where they can use his brains. He'll hate it, but it'll keep him safe."

"He's got to take his chance with the others, Peter," she said. It wasn't the war she was worrying about just then. It was the realization that when her husband commenced his periodic climbing, his eyes were for the peak alone. His impedimenta were abandoned; and she was part of the impedimenta. She must learn to efface herself at those times; everything else was an intrusion. Not for her, even, the negative joy of comforting and succoring on the hard way. Only when he slipped in an occasional crevasse did he acknowledge any need for assistance. He was very near a big crevasse at that moment.

He was in splendid, receptive condition for wandering bacteria. They responded enthusiastically to the choice of a battle-ground, and tramped in countless millions to the assault. On a Saturday night he wrote "Finis" to the play, and posted it with his own hand to Field. On Sunday he was struggling hard to prevent a similar inscription being scored across himself.

Virulent influenza, Dr. Payne called it, but meningitis was abroad, carried from the crowded camps, and there were some tough days, and stubborn nights before the devoted Payne, who had hardly left him, was satisfied that he would escape.

"He'll do," he pronounced at last, "but it was tough sledging. A matter of nursing from now on."

For three weeks longer Philip was spoiled and cosseted by a trained nurse and Margaret, who completed the job of hauling him out of the crevasse. Peter came, when he could manage leave, and told Philip how splendidly Arthur Lee was knocking his little lot into shape.

"They laughed at him as an 'English Johnny' for a while," he said, "but their hats are off to him now. They even salute him. He knows his job, you see; that's why the chaps have taken such a shine to him."

Peter was quite happy in camp, attached to a public school corps, which tented and messed together. He enthused Philip by mentioning a score of names of friends and acquaintances who had gone into camp.

"It's funny to see Johnny Harper taking orders from his chauffeur," he laughed; "but Johnny's got into it wonderfully quickly. His pater, old Judge Harper, was out in Camp last Sunday, with a mob of society people, and Johnny had to come and ask leave of the shover to go outside camp bounds with them to the station."

"I'll be there as soon as they let me up," said Philip. "I'm free now. Field's got his play."

Field realized that he had, indeed, "got his play." He read it, with careless interest for a few minutes; then, as he got past the exposition, his eyes became fixed, and his mouth tense. It was the real thing—alive, throbbing with humanity. This man acted so, not to make a "big" situation, but because his nature drove him just in that direction. With a tremendous relief M.J. noted the presence of those important viscera, the lack of which had condemned the previous offering of Philip.

He had telephoned Margaret, asking when he could

come out and see her husband, only to learn that he was battling for life. Then, three weeks later, she had bidden him come. He taxied out immediately.

His breezy, coarse, friendly personality was a tonic in the room. Philip's feebleness, so noticeable a moment before, seemed vitalized by his entrance. He brightened to a smile, and his voice grew stronger. Field wasted no time on condolences or small-talk. He seated himself on the bed, and plunged into his business.

"Well, young feller, me lad, you've delivered the goods this time," he announced, "and I wouldn't sell my half-share for three times what it cost me. Only thing that worries me is the title—'Game and Rubber'—dam' silly title. We must change that.

"I like the title," insisted Philip.

"But the public won't know what it means from a bar of soap," objected Field.

"The public's not such a fool as you and Amanda and I thought it was, M.J.," said Philip.

Field chuckled reminiscently.

"I deserved that, but, for God's sake, don't rub it in," he begged.

Margaret came in, and Field jumped off the bed.

"We were discussing the title of the new play, Mrs. Lee," he said. "I don't like it, though the piece will be immense."

"Oh, how splendid!" she exclaimed. Philip already looked more like himself. She sat beside him, and he reached out for her hand. "Only, I can't express an opinion on the title, because I haven't heard what it is."

Not an atom of reproach was in her voice, and she smiled at Philip serenely.

"The close hound!" observed Field, with emphasis. "And why?"

"Superstition, partly," explained Philip, but a dull red mounted and stained neck and brow. Suddenly this trivial incident had shown him how far out of his thoughts he had shut his wife. "And then I had an idea that was new to me. I concentrated on it. Amanda and her successor were almost the result of collaboration.

I got the idea that interplay of minds on original work is a blunder. I—I—suppose I was anxious that only you and I, M.J., should know the extent of a third failure."

It was only part of the explanation, and he knew it. She knew it, too, but she gave the thin hand a pat.

"I really believe that clumsy old Peter and I bullied you into errors of judgment over Amanda," she admitted.

"I'll go bail there's no failure about this," Field declared, warmly—"all but the title, that is. Can't honestly say I'm in love with that. It rouses expectations of a farce. 'Game and Rubber!' Why not—'Three of a Kind,' 'A Pair of Queens,' 'All But,' 'A Full House?' All pure farce, my dear ass, pure farce."

Philip laughed at his vehemence.

"If my 'Game and Rubber' gives you 'A Full House,'" he giped, "it will be a darned profitable game."

Field shouted.

"I'll guarantee the full house," he promised, emphatically. "We'll pack 'em in. By James, we'll make that title do, after all, dear boy. Can't you see the posters we'll get out?" He waved a hand largely round an imaginary picture. "The posters! Get this idea. A card-table, with four gamblers seated round it—greedy, excited faces—grabbers, every man jack of 'em—the bodies in shadow, but a strong light on their faces—money on the table, the winners reaching for the shekels in triumph, the losers with a hang-dog look—game and rubber. Do you get it?"

Margaret winked at Philip. The excitement of an advertising scheme had gripped Field. He actually saw the poster he was describing.

"But it doesn't come into the play, M.J. My game is merely symbolical."

"What the—what does that matter?" shouted Field. "This is symbolical, too, my dear idiot, and it will bring 'em into the theatre. If Australians aren't gamblers, they're nothing. It's in us all. We'll win out over

this." He paused for a few seconds, his lips pursed, and his eyes half closed. His chair was tilted back on its legs. He came to the perpendicular with a thud, and banged one excited fist into the other.

"We've got to do it right, laddie," he said. "And what does right mean, I ask you. Does it mean a *première* in Australia, with a maximum of a thirteen weeks' season? By James it doesn't. It ought to mean London, but unless I'm a fool there'll be nothing but revivals over there for a long time. So it's got to mean the little village on the Hudson—yes, that's the ticket. New York. They understand these things in New York, and back it will come with a whale of an ad. tied to it, and half a dozen companies clamoring to put it on the road. Then London, if you like, when the Kaiser's dead and damned. What about that for a program?"

His eyes glistened.

"I'll have to leave it all to you, M.J.," said Philip.

"You see I'm going into camp as soon as I'm up."

Field looked at the white, thin, eager face, and from it he glanced at Margaret, who shook her head silently.

"You'll have to pick up a bit first," he said. "Before you can start out on your campaign, we'll have mine all planned out. Well, time's up. I'll have to push on. Take care of yourself, and keep sober."

With a rush and a whirl he was gone.

Philip found that all his calculations had to be revised. Payne first tried to dissuade him from offering himself, in his weak state, but his patient was obstinate. He went, and was rejected without anything more than a preliminary examination.

The medical examiner was big, bluff Tom Hammond, a brother Savage.

"You're out of this for six months or a year, Phil," he said, bluntly. "Your heart is none too good, and you're just rocking on your pins. Take a long holiday, and cut and come again."

"Just what I told you, only you had to make an exhibition of yourself before you would believe it," growled Payne. "Do you think you can cut such didoes

as you have been doing and laugh it off in a week or two?"

Field heard of the rejection with frank pleasure.

"I told you they didn't want you married hounds yet. Time enough when they call for you. Now perhaps you'll listen to a plan of mine."

"What it is?" asked Philip.

"It's this. To send your play across to New York and expect an agent to put it across would be fooling with the proposition. The agent would write a nice letter, and that would be the last we would hear of the play. A man has to look for an opening and insert himself in it, before another hound grabs the opportunity."

"But you've got friends there—fellows in your own line. Surely they'd read it, and if it were good enough they'd put it on," suggested Philip.

"You're cold, old chap, dead cold," grinned Field. "Every last one of my friends over there is playing his own hand. A fat lot of notice they'd take of a bundle of manuscript that fell out of the mail on to their tables. They get about two million things to read in the course of a twelve month. No chance. But there is a way."

"Well?" prompted Philip.

"Take it over yourself. Get into the swim. I can give you letters of introduction. Join the Lambs' Club. Get to know those fellows socially. Use your personality. Better still, make Mrs. Lee use hers—and then, when you've got 'em warmed up—spring it on the cows. It only wants a reading. Not a cold, blasted, perfunctory reading, such as an agent would give 'em, but one that's got 'em interested from the jump. If that don't land you a contract, nothing will, and M.J. will have to race over there and take a theatre himself."

Philip was staggered by the proposition.

"I can't go wandering about, while Peter and the rest are fighting for me," he objected.

"Just as well wander over there as barge about here, doing nothing and eating your heart out," countered Field.

"Besides, it's going to cost money, and I've just about come to the end of your check for the half-interest."

"Go and get your head read," Field advised him, with vulgar emphasis. "We're partners. You've supplied a bobby-dazzler of a play; I'm going to put up reasonable funds to bring this off."

"But you made the writing of it possible in the first place, M.J.," said Philip. "That's all anyone could possibly expect—more than anyone could expect. If I can't market it, that's my look-out."

Field looked up at him, his cigar tilted quizzically, and one eye shut.

"Pardon me, friend, it's my look-out," he said. "The marketing of stuff like this is an art in itself. If I trusted to you alone, a fat chance I'd ever have of bringing home the bacon. I'm protecting my own interests, and as the sleeping partner I'm — well going to tell you you've got to do your share, and sell the dam' thing. Is that clear?"

"Your goodness is; all the rest is humbug. Did anyone tell you I ought to have a long holiday?" he asked, curiously.

"Lord, no, and I hope no one does, for you're not going to get much of a holiday out of this. As soon as you strike New York, you'll have to be into it. This is just the time, too, with half the theatres shut down till October, and managers taking stock. Whip over as soon as you can, and you might land your man for the coming season. Make your arrangements and leave the bills to me. Only hurry up. And for God's sake clear out, I'm beastly busy this morning."

Once more Field had characteristically shown his good heart.

"You're a brick, M.J.," Philip told him, lamely enough.

"I'll throw myself at you if you don't clear out of this," replied Field. "The 'Niagara's' a good boat. The skipper's a pal of mine, too. You'll like him. Get out."

Margaret was not particularly pleased at the idea of



the United States jaunt. Her own country held her by an unusually strong thread at this juncture. Like most of her class, she had identified herself with committees of one sort or another, all having for object the comfort of the new troops. It seemed like running away from responsibility. Peter laughed at her.

"Phil can't go over to Egypt yet awhile. He's got to go on with his job, as an alternative. He can't live on air. He's written a corking play apparently, and he's simply bound to go to the best market and sell it. How is that running away from responsibility? In my opinion it's taking up his main responsibility—looking after his family, and the humble necessary larder."

His clear, downright common sense comforted her. What a dependable person he was! How she would hate leaving him!

She flushed scarlet. Why fool herself any longer in this way? Why not admit that it was leaving Peter that filled her with foreboding? For her Australia meant Peter, reliable, massive, comforting. No further word she uttered in objection. Rapidly she got ready, even seemed eager to go. The truth was she was afraid of herself. This was a new personality she was meeting, not the old Margaret at all.

On their last Sunday she and Philip drove out to the camp at Broadmeadows, tucked away in the tiny, uncomfortable car that Dr. Payne tolerated. It was to be a final visit, for they were to leave for Sydney on the next day.

They had a jolly tea; Peter made an excuse of a duty he invented, to save Sir Arthur the embarrassment of not asking him to sit down, and came back just as they had finished. Arthur was explaining a technical point to Philip, and Payne was with the batman, looking at the horse-lines.

Peter and Margaret were alone. She rose from her seat, and walked to the tent-door, looking wistfully over the huge field of giant mushrooms. Peter joined her, and almost mechanically they strolled outside.

"You'll have a wonderful time," he ventured, as she did not speak.

"I'm frightened, Peter. It's such a lonely prospect. Not a single mind in the whole of New York that reaches out to mine, and I'm such a terrible creature for holding out friendly hands."

"Except Phil's," he reminded.

"Of course. Except Phil's . . . Peter, it seems such an idiotic thing to tell you to take care of yourself, but don't you know what I mean? Recklessness—audacity; I—I don't want you to come back with a string of medals. I'll take the bravery for granted. But—just—come—back."

"Why, Margaret!" he said, gently, for she was crying, unashamed. "Of course I'm coming back. I know how you feel. All the women who come here are the same. One last Sunday stopped and shook hands with a fellow she didn't know from Adam, and burst into tears. It's just tension. It's a big job we're on, and there's a sort of national hysteria. Funny thing is the soldier feels it least of all. Don't know it is so funny after all. He has a definite job. The women have only to wait."

He made haste to shift the cause of her breakdown to a general feeling, with a delicacy that was natural to him.

"Oh, I'm upset by having to go away," she made excuse.

"Only another house in the same old road," he smiled. "Get into Number Three, on the sunny morning side. I'm looking forward to your letters tremendously."

"We'll be such thousands of miles away," she said, "and letters are stupid things. . . . We'll have to be getting back."

They were behind the last row of tents, and in the distance they could see little groups of people, coming and going. For practical purposes they were alone.

Margaret turned to him on an impulse.

"I'm going to say good-bye to you here, Peter,"

she said. "It's a rather special occasion, and it's for a very long time." Her voice grew suddenly husky, with an unwonted timidity. "Peter, I would rather like you to—kiss me, just for once."

Peter's face was turned to her, with a look of adoration in his eyes. His hands went out; then he drew back.

"I don't think I—I—could stand that, Margaret," he said, and his face turned an ugly red.

"Peter!" she just whispered, and turned away, so that his loyalty might not read her shamed heart.

END OF BOOK III.

## BOOK IV.—ASHES

### CHAPTER XXV

*"Over the edge of the purple down,  
Where the single lamplight gleams,  
Know ye the road to the Merciful Town,  
That is hard by the Sea of Dreams?  
Where the poor may lay their wrongs away,  
And the sick may forget to weep?  
But we—pity us! Oh, pity us!  
We wakeful; ah, pity us!  
We must go back with Policeman Day—  
Back from the City of Sleep!"*

—THE CITY OF SLEEP

**T**HE truest way of judging one's country is to leave it. An exile sees it in the round, so to speak. Asperities soften; small prejudices disappear. At home one's particular section of society looms gigantic and obscures the rest. A gnat on a telescope will destroy the view of a mountain.

It was not the size of the city that daunted her, so much as its noise—the clangor and clatter of unsleeping restlessness. Her spirit shrank from its echoing roar, as flesh shrinks from hot iron. Street cars on the roadways, railways, metallicly whining overhead made conversation impossible, until tympana mercifully accommodated themselves to endure what could not be cured. In the stores, she would pause in her speech, until the grinding rush of an Elevated train should cease, only to find that another was shrieking past, bound in the opposite direction, and this at minute intervals. Her distress corrugations of brow drew discreet smiles from the salesladies.

With Philip it was otherwise. His interest was too great for critical analysis. Besides, London, quiet though it was in comparison, had inured him to big cities.

"What are you afraid of?" he laughed. "It's only Sydney, magnified ten diameters."

"It's an endless moving-picture, without its blessed quiet," she returned; "Babel, concentrated and intensified through a giant megaphone! Do they never sleep, these people? I was awake till four o'clock this morning, and at six the din simply wrenched me from a dream that we were home again. Couldn't we get a room on a quieter side of the hotel?"

"There is no quiet side," he said; "you'll get used to it."

"I hope I won't have time to," she said. "Oh, Phil, surely it won't take long to launch the play."

He looked at her in surprise, and then came over and put his arms around her. He couldn't understand why the excitement of the venture that meant so much to them both should not have seized her as well. The joy of life was running strong in him. Though still far from robust, it lent a flash to his eye and a timbre to his voice that gave him all his old magnetism. She settled herself more comfortably in his arms, and forgot herself in listening to his enthusiasm. He sat down with her, and made love to her prettily.

"I suppose I ought to say that I should have come alone, but I won't say it, because I couldn't do without you, Margaret. But I love being here. New York has got into my blood. Sleep! Who wants to sleep? There's too much to see to waste time in bed. If you could only enjoy it as I do! It spoils it for me, when I see you unhappy."

"Poor old darling, I won't be a wet blanket any longer. I'm just homesick, that's all."

And thereafter she hid her feelings. Not for worlds would she have let him know that the city filled her with a queer apprehension. Her mind seemed dulled, as her senses sharpened; her brain an empty chamber

echoing with discordant noises; but her nerves, newly-discovered, abnormally acute.

Philip seemed to find rest in movement. By her own desire he left Margaret in the hotel, and wandered forth into the confusion. The lane of light that runs from the Battery to the Bronx, like a curving necklace of brilliants drew him irresistibly. The flashing lights of the theatre district lit a flame in his soul. Here was his own battle-ground.

He watched the faces of the people, as they poured endlessly from the Subway in Times Square, or pushed purposefully through revolving doors of immense office buildings. He told himself that between him and them existed a relation of enormous significance. Possibly in no similar place will one see more divergent types than in that city and at that corner. Yet two thousand of these men and women, taken at absolute random, were to sit as a jury and determine whether he, Philip Lee, were to go on writing plays or not. That fellow who looked like a gunman out of a moving-picture, that fat faced vulgarian who was licking from his lips the last, sweet savor of a departed cocktail, that exquisitely dressed woman, with a bored, vapid face, about to enter a superb automobile at the Astor Hotel opposite, might quite easily be instrumental in ruining his future by a scornful turning down of thumbs.

He wondered afresh at the delusion of the world which had thoughtlessly decided to regard the snap judgment of a few hundred semi-educated hedonist habitués of The Great White Way as the voice of Olympus, to mar or to make.

Then, tired and strained, he found his way back to Margaret, and in fitful sleep dreamed that he had conquered New York.

It was a fortnight before he presented Field's letter. Hugo Voynich was one of those Europeans whom New York captured young, and who grew up to capture New York in their turn. Self-educated, in the marvelous way of his kind, who begin by ignorance of the language of the people they conquer and place under

tribute, but end by bettering the instruction they receive, Voynich possessed a ferocious greed, masked by a superficial good humor. Beneath this concealing cover, his brain cast its reckonings. He smiled at you, joked with you, lunched with you, all the while weighing you. If you could be of use to him, he purchased your brain at his own price. If you were wanting, he discarded you, without even the *solatium* of a reason. Men he dined with yesterday, he passed blindly to-day. They had lost their sole reason for surviving in his calculating memory.

Not an attractive personality was Voynich, either in character or in his person, which was obese, small and unclean. Philip disliked him at first sight. But the theatrical writ of Hugo Voynich ran in four big cities, and seven road companies were making fortunes for him in the provinces.

Not a word said Philip of the play. Field had advised him not to show his hand too soon. He was an Australian traveling, and Field threw him on Voynich's mercy. He was to see New York, and was particularly interested in the theatre.

Hospitality in America is as great a tradition as in Australia. It operates even more largely and certainly more lavishly. Two minutes after an introduction in a hotel, you are quite likely to be invited for lunch; the afternoon will bring you an offer of membership of a club, and a dinner in the evening will give you an opportunity to refuse or accept a week-end at a country house. The American heart is never so full of friendliness that it cannot hold a drop more.

The ostentation of the low-class Jew moved Voynich to a careless prodigality in social relations. He looked at Philip, reflected for smiling seconds, and decided that he was worth a dinner. His business connection with Field, for whom he found vaudeville attractions for Australia, would stand that.

"Field says Mrs. Lee is with you. You must bring her, too," said Voynich.

He spoke in a guttural, thick voice, whose original

native accent had been overlaid by the inflections of the Lower East Side.

"Er—that's kind of you, Mr. Voynich," said Philip; "but—I'm afraid my wife is hardly—er—up to it."

Voynich's piggy eyes flashed.

"Sick, eh? Oh, that's a pity. No hurry. We'll wait till she's better again," he replied, imperturbably, and Philip had a feeling that the shrewd brain had understood the shallow excuse. He got up. The magnate's manner had indicated that he had given all the time he could spare. The visitor felt himself dismissed. He had not made much of an impression.

At the door he was recalled.

"Hey, Mr. Lee. Wait one moment. Maybe the Madam would like to go to one of my shows, if she's well enough." He scribbled on a card. "Take that to the box-office at de t'eatre, an' they will give you a box. Forty-t'oid Street." Philip took the card, and thanked Voynich.

That night they went and were shown into the box. Margaret loved the theatre, and had been glad to leave the hotel and its ornate loneliness. During the first interval, the door opened, and Voynich entered. He was in evening dress, and three diamond studs made too much glory in his shirt-front. Philip had told Margaret his fear that the interview in the afternoon had not been much of a success. She smiled her sweetest smile, and resolved to ignore everything in Hugo Voynich but his power to help Philip.

Philip watched the fat, loose face, wreathed in complimentary smiles, and thought how far a man must condescend for the palms of success. He saw Margaret's pure, wide brow side by side with the vicious, false good humor of the host, and had an instant's impulse to thrust Voynich on one side, as something noisome, and carry his wife off. The cost of achievement may be too high. But the curtain went up, and with the continuance of the play came the quick thought that in a little while he would be watching his own work,



if he could play his cards right, and of those cards, the chief was Voynich. He must be patient.

"Your charming wife is better," Voynich said, as they rose after the curtain fell, "and she will dine with me to-morrow night." He smiled. There was malice in the grin, Philip could have sworn.

"We are both obliged to you for your kindness, Mr. Voynich," was all he could say.

Philip met Wanda Lara the following evening at Voynich's dinner.

She possessed a rare type of beauty—the face of a woman who has suffered, whom life has beaten, but not to her knees, a fragile, wan, appealing beauty. You thought of bent lilies in a storm-swept garden when you looked at her.

With her, and the only other guest, was Acton St. Ledger. They were both playing in "Benediction," in its second year on Broadway, a play with the saintly flavor which at the psychological moment touches the sentimental heart of New York, and dissolves its calluses in tears of salt, making hardened playgoers sniffle and think of far away mothers' knees. It had given rise to the *mot* on its first appearance—"It is not so much a *première* as a revival."

St. Ledger was a beauty actor, as yet unravished by moving-pictures. He was shallow-pated, but smart, big but flabby. His voice caressed women but disgusted men; a fellow in whom every praise has to be qualified with a "but." Women called him "a lovely man," "a darling," and several other things real men most assuredly should not be.

Philip bowed in answer to Voynich's introduction to Wanda, and straightened himself to find St. Ledger's glance upon him. It surprised him by its causeless hostility; he surprised himself by his answering flash.

Philip was at his best. He sat by Wanda, and to his astonishment found that she could talk: not the vapid exchange of current gossip and newspaper comment that passes for conversation, but original, witty, satisfying remarks, that enchained his interest.

She loved New York, and told him some little known facts about it that transformed it from a hurry-scurry warren of scrambling human rabbits to a dignified, stately city with a great historical significance. Father Knickerbocker came to life and stalked along the quiet streets of his own Manhattan. Her musical voice, with its racy idiom, charmed his ears, and he exerted all his own charm to please her.

Voynich broke into the discussion. The table was too small for sustained tête-à-tête talk. His East Side accent grated harshly after Wanda's polished phrase.

"Noo York's the finest city on God's Oirth," he pronounced, with a finality that roused all the critical faculties in Philip.

"You're a traveler, Mr. Voynich?" he suggested. "I suppose you see them all, and can compare them annually."

"Me? Travel? I never move away from the ground between Fifty-sixt' and T'city-t'oid," he said, "except for a fly over de river to a roadhouse now and again. No, sir."

"You have a wonderful city, I think," said Philip; "but it's parvenu and provincial. One notices that at once."

This was too much for Voynich, but Wanda sprang to the rescue.

"Parvenu!" Her voice was all exclamation marks.

"Yes, undoubtedly. Your magnificence is so freshly acquired that the city overdresses herself to astonish and overwhelm. What is that but the mark of the parvenu? It has its attractions, I admit, but London and Paris are sure enough of themselves to take themselves and their position for granted. You haven't come to that. You fling up ostentatious palaces one day, and pay a fortune to breakers to fling them down the next, in order to put up something that will impress even further."

"Why shouldn't we? We can afford it," Wanda retorted.

"Exactly," he laughed. "You've got the money. The parvenu's answer pat."

"But—provincial!" she challenged, with more notes of exclamation.

"Yes, provincial as well."

"If New York isn't the metropolis, it's nothing," she said.

"Metropolis of what? It sets the fashions, I'll admit; but where does it look for its standards even for clothes, not to say its art, its legal system—oh, everything that makes the life of a city? Why, to Paris and London, to be sure. Philadelphia looks to New York, but does Chicago? New York ordinary folk ape the manners of your Four Hundred, who are not in the Four Hundred unless they have more or less faithfully copied the same thing from London and Paris."

"I deny it," she cried, indignantly.

"Why do your leading tailors advertise 'The Real Bond Street Cut for Superior Men,' if trade hasn't told them that Bond Street and Savile Row are looked up to as temples of the Superior? You're a big, overgrown, conceited, bullying, toadying copy-cat, but we can't help loving you, because you're so young and will grow out of it," laughed Philip.

"Listen to the citizen of Wagga Wagga lecturing," crowed Wanda, taking it in good part. "Who regulates the traffic in Main Street now? Tom Brodie did when I was there, from the porch of the hotel."

She laughed musically at his consternation.

"And were you ever in Australia?" Margaret asked.

"I was born in Australia," she said, "and went back three years ago for auld lang syne. Now you know how very amusing you are, with your lectures on provincialism," she told Philip.

"We're provincials together," he insisted, "only we know it, and you don't."

Voynich got up. They had reached the liquor stage.

"Stay where you are a moment," he said. "I'll call up and see if they've got a box left. I'd like Mr. Lee to see you act, Wanda."

"He thinks you've been calling me names, Mr. Lee," she rippled, as Voynich walked away. "Have you seen the show?"

"Not yet," he said. Margaret looked up. St. Ledger had been talking in the low, impressive tone he kept for women, and she was bored. She noted Philip's keen, interested look, and happy smile, and was pleased that he had had a more enjoyable time than she herself, with St. Ledger making thin, anaemic love to her.

"Are we going to see Miss Lara act, Philip?" she asked. Voynich supplied the answer.

"Come on. You and Acton better hurry, Wanda. I'll bring them round to your dressing-room in the intermission."

Then began a night which Margaret never forgot. Voynich had hit upon the idea of doing the thing properly, and showing these guests from the Antipodes how l'il ole Noo York did things, when she set out to enjoy herself.

After seeing "Benediction," they were hurried off to a Midnight Frolic on top of the New Amsterdam Theatre. At about two Margaret rose from her seat at the supper-table, with profound thankfulness that she at last could go to bed, only to find that the indefatigable Voynich had a car waiting to take them to Chinatown and a Chop Suey supper in that carefully staged quarter. But even then release did not come. The car whirled them up-town once more, and at Jack's they met a crowd of idiots as mad as they, regaling themselves on a breakfast of ham and eggs, a dish that had suddenly whirled into fashion.

Margaret unashamedly fell asleep, taking advantage of a comfortable corner seat. Wanda Lara, who had joined them at the Midnight Frolic, with St. Ledger, would not allow Philip to wake her.

It was five o'clock on a bitter November morning before she crawled into bed, more dead than alive. She slept for ten hours, exhausted by her compulsory enjoyment.

Philip was at her side when she awoke.

"That girl Miss Lara is just the type I want for my Mrs. Devenage," he said. "I simply must get Voynich to take the play. Where would I get elsewhere such a perfect fit for that part? It was built for her."

She smiled at his enthusiasm.

"Go and talk to her about it, darling," she yawned. "She seems a splendid sort of girl, and I'm sure she'll love Mrs. Devenage. If she wants to there's no doubt she can make Mr. Voynich do whatever she wishes. And she likes you already, anyone can see."

"Do you think so?" asked Philip, eagerly.

"Think so? If I was a silly, jealous sort of idiot, I'd have scratched her last night. I only hope you can make her like you enough to insist on 'Game and Rubber' being her next play. Now, do go away, and let me rest. Oh, dear, I hope they don't make me enjoy myself to-night. I'll be dead."

An hour later she was writing a letter to Peter, and it was dated from "Hurry-on Avenue."

## CHAPTER XXVI

*"When Nag the basking cobra hears the careless foot of man  
He will sometimes wriggle sideways and avoid it if he can,  
But his mate makes no such motion as she camps beside her trail,  
For the female of her species is more deadly than the male."*

—THE FEMALE OF THE SPECIES

WANDA LARA lived in a suite of rooms at one of the big hotels. She seemed to possess unlimited money to gratify all her varied desires. Her apartments themselves were evidence of this.

She had begun by sweeping them bare of all their original furnishings, and from the walls she ordered the paper to be stripped. Then her canvas stood ready for her. She could express herself, in all the freedom of a bizarre sense of color and texture.

The rooms were three in number. The first delighted the eye with the palest of pastel pinks, the only contrasting note being daring old-gold window hangings. In exquisite gradations of tint, the pink gradually blushed to the deep rose that filled the further end of the room with a soft radiance. And as the walls progressed in semi-tones, so did the corresponding furniture, and electric-light shades. Silken brocades, covering period furniture, grew in depth of color, till it seemed as though a shadow lay upon a rose-garden.

Folding doors that could be flung back, making one immense room, opened into a sort of boudoir, done in warm crimsons, a nest that invited to the indolent delights of *laissez-faire*. Huge chairs and a broad divan in soft crimson *suede* offered cosy comfort. In the further wall a door led to the bedroom, which completed a crescendo of color with a burning flame effect of mingled reds and yellows. Its crudity shocked; its

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insistence repelled; but it doubtless supplied a note for which the curious mind of Wanda craved. It was tonic, if barbaric. Its very elemental character braced the spirit after the too pretty effect of the long reception-room.

There were people who said the suite represented a rake's progress in Wanda's affections, from the pink of dawning desire to the flame in which satisfaction was quenched. Certain it is that acquaintance never progressed farther than the first room, while the second belonged to intimacy. Of the third there is nothing to say.

But if the taste of the color scheme were questionable, that of the adornment could not be impugned. Furniture, pure Heppelwhite, bric-a-brac severely scanty, flowers even, were perfect, while a few, a very few pictures, mostly etchings, bore testimony to an artist's educated eye, but hung rather starkly against the too colorful background.

In this setting Wanda looked more like a lily than ever, her color drained by her surroundings.

Philip's first swift thought attributed to her an austere purity. She appealed to his sense of chivalry. There was something in her which held itself rigidly aloof from men, something that plaintively called for protection.

It was an illusion. In Wanda Lara sex was supreme, if somewhat perverse. By her very backward gesture she allured. Her eyes were fugitive, but her mouth beckoned the pursuer. She had a mind careful of the world's opinion, but unafraid of it. She smiled at the whispers of doubt whether she was not too good to be true, but she did not wish to risk the loud stridency of discovered scandal. Discretion governed her actions accordingly. But she never forewent her chief diversion of poking sluggish mankind from behind the bars of her apparent detachment. Her passions were a sheathed flame which seared others, while it failed to warm herself.

Philip had attracted her. On Margaret she had cast

the rapid, appraising look which woman gives to sister-woman, and in that instant had understood that they were of two different codes. So the beautiful jungle beast, ranging far and fighting hard, might view her domesticated sister, tamely feeding from the hand of her captor. Not for an instant did she regard Philip at that stage as a man whose possession she cared to dispute, but she belonged to the fairly numerous class of women, in whom sleek lawfulness arouses a species of *micning mallecho*, a desire to throw a hammer into the cogs of a smooth-running domestic machine, and with gleeful mischief watch the result.

Philip, with an eager wish to please her in such fashion that he might ultimately persuade her to create the part of Mrs. Devenage in his play, responded with flattering alacrity to the invitation she gave for him to call. She had paid a visit to Margaret, and had included her, with a sweetly impressive look, which, however, challenged acceptance. Philip went alone.

Wanda uttered conventional regrets at Margaret's absence, which she perfectly understood. Philip, to sweeten the defection, made occasion to repeat Margaret's description of her as "a splendid girl." Wanda smiled.

"How sweet of her!" she said.

The touch of reserve in her manner charmed Philip, whose British soul the effusive would have alarmed. A maid brought in tea, and hovered discreetly, quite evidently by command. Philip smiled secretly at the virginal precaution. As though she were not sufficiently protected by her mail of purity, he thought to himself.

The talk was bright. She knew how to manage men, and she deftly contrived to make the conversation display Philip, his hopes and his opinions. She had a pleasant, deprecating way of shrugging away the compliments he made on her own acting, and immediately steered the talk back to his important self. He thought she was so intelligent. He was right. When he, almost by inadvertence, revealed the fact that he had brought a play to New York, she displayed charming pleasure



and surprise. Some day he must read it to her. Oh, nonsense, it would be of the greatest interest in the world. When he got up to go, she sent her love, with a pretty, modest hesitation, to his wife. He considered that so sweet and friendly of her. He was correspondingly annoyed, when Margaret smiled.

"She took a tremendous fancy to you, Margaret," he said.

"Yes, there's something about me she admires," she replied, demurely. "My dear old thing, your Wanda is a very clever woman."

There are compliments that sting. How cattish a good woman can be! Philip reflected sorrowfully. Better knowledge would make Margaret admit she was hasty in her judgment.

He arranged a luncheon with this object. It was a success. For an hour they talked without saying anything, and, as women do in some occult way, said good-bye with a perfect comprehension of each other.

"She'll take Philip from me, if she can. Let her try," thought Margaret.

"I hate that serene type of woman. She despises me," thought Wanda. "One of these days she'll see."

"Thank goodness they both appreciate each other now," thought Philip. "You remember you considered she was a splendid girl at first," he reminded his wife.

"Oh, she's wonderful," agreed Margaret.

"Isn't she?" said Philip.

On his second visit the maid did not hover. Wanda still leaned backward; she still wore her purity like a garment; but if it were not an impossible thing, there was a provocative gleam in her eyes that in a less innocent personality would have meant—"Come and catch me." Wanda was busy poking between the bars.

She asked him to tell her about the play—not to miss the tiniest thing. Then he must read it to her. It was a dull, November afternoon, and the trees in the Park opposite dripped mournfully in a thin fog. She shivered and drew the old-gold hangings across the windows, and switched on rosy lights. Warm comfort lapped them

in little waves. Wanda had hesitated a little at his proffered cigarette-case. Would a refusal impress him? She decided that too much *jeune fille* would be overdoing it, and she accepted one. She leaned back on her cushions and made graceful play. One arm, in a loose sleeve, shown in all its blue-veined beauty, was thrust behind her head, while a silken ankle gleamed in obtrusive innocence, idly stirring light skirts with its swing. Its fellow, rigorously concealed, rested on the end of the couch. Silken ankles of purity have an attraction that the ankles of immodesty lack. Wanda was deliciously unaware of Philip's eyes.

He talked. He talked with that swift enthusiasm which always gripped him, when he spoke of his ambition. He pictured for her the drama which he had imagined; drew for her the portrait of Mrs. Devenage, the woman who had sworn to avenge her husband's suicide on the man for whose crime he had died; painted too, the latter, with his solid useful future built on his wretched deed, actuated by sincerity and a burning love of country. And then he described the way in which Mrs. Devenage at last, after a decade, met her husband's virtual slayer, met him in ignorance and loved him for precisely those qualities which had made him a marked man among men; he put to Wanda the problem which had tortured Mrs. Devenage—to ignore the past and take the joyous gift which Life was offering her, or to appease the *manes* of her dead husband, and blast the life of the man she loved? Skilfully he showed the mingled good and bad impulses which had brought about the original tragedy, indicated the gradual elimination of the dross of selfishness and greed from his protagonist's character; on the other hand he did not hide the dastardly meanness that had changed Mrs. Devenage into a woman with a mission, which had at last become an *idée fixe*.

Wanda had paid little attention at first. The music of Philip's voice, and the fire in his eyes had drawn her mind from his words. They were a mere *obbligato*. But as his story progressed, she found her artist's mind

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following him, and the crisis stirred her with its dramatic possibilities. When he put his dilemma, with an appeal for her woman's solution, she considered a moment, with half-closed eyes.

"She would blast him, and then give herself to him to build his life afresh," she replied, out of her artistic intuition. Wanda, the authentic Wanda Lara, would herself have done nothing of the sort.

"Exactly what she does," exulted Philip, glad beyond measure that their minds jumped so nicely. "But why should she?"

"Woman's superstition," answered Wanda. "She would fear her husband's unending enmity and his malign influence on their happiness, unless she threw a sop to Cerberus. She ruined your hero to please the late lamented, and married the wreck she had made to please herself. I want to read the play, and as quickly as possible," she said, imperiously.

"Are you as interested as all that?" he asked, flattered.

"Yes. I see myself as your Mrs. Devenage. Is she young?"

"She was a girl, married to a middle-aged man at the time of the crash," he explained, "and ten years go by before she meets the man for whom she is looking. She would be about thirty."

"That would be just right," she admitted. "I'm twenty-nine. Let me see it to-morrow."

He was glowing. No wonder he thought she was rather a wonderful person—a fairy, who with a wave of a magic wand might create for him a kingdom into which he might immediately enter.

He took his play next day, but she was uneasy, for some reason. He had come prepared to spend another delightful afternoon, but she seemed anxious that he should go. She listened with knitted, business-like brows to his necessary explanations, and did not ask him to sit down.

He made a laughing farewell, and turned to the door. Before he reached it, however, it was opened

without ceremony, and a man entered. Wanda's eyes dilated just the slightest. Otherwise she was equal to the situation. Philip did not even know a situation existed. He waited for the necessary introduction, and then held out his hand, raising his eyes to the visitor's face. As he did so, he received an impression of malignant, damnable evil. Two eyes held his, and in their depths he saw suspicion and a flash of dislike. They were curious eyes, filled with a dull gleam of polished steel. It was as though a thousand years of antipathy had culminated in that long glance, in which the rapiers of their minds had crossed.

"Let me introduce Mr. Roger Ferrero—Mr. Lee," murmured Wanda. Then to the visitor, "You are earlier than you said."

"It is good to be early sometimes," replied Ferrero, with a hint of double meaning in his voice. It reached Wanda, for her pallor became suddenly red. She, so self-possessed, seemed at a loss.

"Mr. Lee has a play in which I am to appear," she said, and it almost had the air of a justification. "Leave it for the present, Mr. Lee, and I will read it, and let you know."

"So you are to appear in a play you have not yet read?" Ferrero murmured, softly, and smiled as though he had caught her. "Voynich seems to be under your thumb. How is Voynich, by the way?"

"Just the same," she replied indifferently, and held out her hand in dismissal to Philip. He bowed, nodded to Ferrero, and went away wondering what that boulder wanted to butt in like that for, confound his colossal impudence.

The door closed on him, and Wanda turned fiercely to Ferrero.

"Roger, I must warn you that I will not tolerate the airs of a proprietor you assume towards me."

His small, delicate hand went up to a dark moustache, and absently twirled in a dandified manner. His eyes were on her with a speculative look.

"But I *am* a proprietor," he said, softly. "And

I know how to take care of my property, you will find. It was unfortunate I had to leave New York so long. But it is well now. I am back again."

His voice had a southern inflection in it that was musical to an extraordinary degree.

"You see, my Wanda, it is only the new men I have to fear for you. You love so to train the new men, and make them jump through the hoops for you. When they become too—what shall we say?—*intime*?—then you are safe once more. I know, I myself was once new, and you would treat me like that, but I am not built like your obedient American and Englishmen, who come back and lick the hand that has struck. Do you remember?"

He laughed, with a genuine mirth, but there was a disagreeable note in the laughter that jarred on her. She did indeed remember. He had come to New York with some famous Italian actors, playing a classic season. Roger had made a big hit in light comedy. The season had been a disaster, but Ferrero had remained under contract. He had been well worth prodding from behind the bars. How could she know the untamed beast within his small frame? He had torn down her bars; he had treated her as she deserved to be treated; how he had laughed at her threats! He mastered her, primitively, savagely. Awed, frightened, her shallow heart touched temporarily into feeling, she had been made to realize that she was his woman. Him only among thousands of his superiors had she obeyed. He bullied, coaxed, spurned, caressed, as the mood seized him, and once he had yielded to an ungovernable madness of temper and had beaten her from an imperious woman to a chattel.

There was no question that she remembered.

"How long will you be here?" she asked.

"For some months at least," he replied. "I will stay at this hotel, I think, and look after my property."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," she retorted. "Do you think I'm anxious for a scandal? Roger Ferrero's

reputation——” She spread out expressive explanatory hands.

He smiled.

“As you will. Am I to be given a cocktail? The Englishman had no tea, I perceive. Did the bad Roger drive him away?”

She met his mocking eyes.

“He is an Australian, not an Englishman. He has a wife with him, a charming woman——”

“And you are giving him lessons in Wanda, eh? Beautiful! So nice for the charming Madame Lee! And she does not come to the reading of the play, no?”

“No. It is business,” she explained.

“Ah! Of course—business. Like the business of the nice boy Paolo with the innocent Francesca! They, too, were reading a book. Yes, I must certainly watch this Paolo and my Francesca.”

“You are the worst man I know, Roger,” she said, vehemently. “I believe there is no crime you would not commit, if it pleased you. Do you think everybody is bad?”

“Well——,” he reflected, his head on one side, “perhaps not everybody. I think—shall we say that I think women over sixty are virtuous, and dead men are trustworthy? Otherwise——” He shrugged his shoulders and looked regretful volumes.

She mixed the cocktails.

“And dear Acton St. Ledger, does he still worship at the shrine of Wanda?” he asked, lazily.

“You’re not jealous of St. Ledger, and yet he does adore me,” she said, curiously.

“Ah, but one is not jealous of women,” he submitted. “I am fond of Acton. I have even lent him money. No, he does not worry me.”

He placed his glass on the little table, and took his hat.

“I will say *au revoir, cara mia*. You will be able to find me at the Actors’, as usual. I will go, and let you enjoy the play of the Australian with the charming

wife. By the way, why does he not fight with his countrymen?"

"I didn't think of asking him," she returned lazily. "Somehow I think he might be rather fond of fighting, if he were ever put to it. Ask him. Voynich is going to put him up at the Actors' Club. Good-bye."

That night, when Voynich dropped into her dressing-room, she turned to him, with little apparent interest.

"Hugo, what are you going to place me in when this rubbish is carted away?" she asked.

"Oh, there's a few month's in 'Benediction' yet," he temporized.

"Haven't you got anything to take its place—a good vehicle for me, I mean, of course?"

"Time enough," he said.

"That means you haven't. Hugo," she said, suddenly, "I've found a play, a big thing, a very big thing."

He looked at her in surprise.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

She knew him well enough not to bungle.

"You fool," she said, scornfully; "you were wining and dining that man Lee, and never got out of him what he was here for. He brought a letter to Olney, as well as to you, and had practically fixed it up, when I got wise. I've beaten Olney to it, I think. Lee eats out of my hand."

Voynich stared.

"But Olney has been in San Francisco ever since Lee got here," he said. He was a hard man to fool. But Wanda knew his obstinate nature. If he thought he was "beating Olney to it," his combativeness would fight for her.

"It was fixed up on the Australian side, for the most part. Lee had you as second string. He'd promised Olney he wouldn't mention it to anyone." She was lying easily, naturally, for the very love of dissimulation.

"And you've read it—this play?" he asked.

"Sure thing. And it's immense—big part for me, and Acton could do the man—just the type of hero the

people eat up. You've got to do it, Hugo, and at once. I'm sick to death of this rotten thing."

With Voynich she affected a rather vulgar, slangy style of conversation. The culture of her ordinary speech irritated him.

"Well, I dunno," he hesitated.

"You just want to save the expense of a production, and depend on 'Benediction' to pull you through another season. It won't do it. We're getting stale on it, and the booking's none too good. All the tears in New York have been shed."

"Where's this play of yours?"

Quickly she produced it, and handed it to him.

"Look here," she said. In a few words she staged the scene for him. "What about this for a curtain?" She declaimed a few sentences and the tag that brought down the first curtain, and her dramatic voice with its exquisite cadences gave full value to the words.

His eyes glistened. Subtleties eluded him, but he was a good judge of broad effects.

"I'll read it," he capitulated. "I'd like to put one over on that feller Olney. Leave this with me."

"Sit here. I'm just due to go on. I want a decision to-night. You can easily finish it before I go home. Stick to it."

"Right," he grunted, and she vanished.

He read on. An hour afterwards, he rose and roared down the passage. Wanda had come off, meantime, slipped on her nun's robes, and gone back to the stage for the Third Act. She smiled to see him so absorbed.

"I say, you Jim!" he shouted.

A boy appeared.

"You tell Jacobs to come here," he ordered.

Jacobs, the producer, soon joined him.

"Get out a scene-plot o' this, and let me have a figurin' o' the cost. Here, sit down here, and I'll give you the outlines o' what we'll want. Far as I can see, we've got everything in the loft."

For twenty minutes Jacobs figured, with the ease of experience. Then, with pencil poised, he gave the total.



Voynich was nothing if not downright.

"Get it going at once. I want this produced in January. We can try-out down at Baltimore."

"Got something good, Governor?" asked Jacobs.

"Better than the best, I reckon. Go to it."

Jacobs opened the door for Wanda, who looked at him curiously.

"Well, was I right?" she asked.

"And then some," said Voynich; "and Mrs. Devenage will make you, you cunning devil," he added.

"As if I didn't know," she retorted.

That night she wrote a note to Philip. As he read it, his face shone.

"What is it?" asked Margaret.

"Voynich has accepted 'Game and Rubber,'" he said. "Miss Lara got him to read it. Isn't she a trump?"

"Does she say when he will produce it?" his wife inquired.

"January," he replied, his eyes busy with the letter.

"Then we can be home by February," she calculated, delightedly. "Oh, Phil, won't it be heavenly to get to an Australian sun once more?"

His tone was not enthusiastic as he agreed perfunctorily.

Margaret, it may be noted, did not read Wanda's letter. Which, on the whole, was just as well—or was it, after all?

Wanda was prodding her "new man," in spite of Ferrero.

## CHAPTER XXVII

*"If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;  
If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;  
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster  
And treat those two impostors just the same;  
If you can fill the unforgiving minute  
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,  
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,  
And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son."*

—If

THERE began for Philip one of the worst periods he had ever endured. He lived at high tension, spending long hours in a close theatre, every minute of that time packed with nervous strain.

Rehearsals were not going well. St. Ledger, either through an obstinate dislike of Philip or because he was not strong enough for the part, made it anaemic, its feebleness emphasized by the strength of Mrs. Devenage. Wanda had succeeded to a miracle. She had clothed herself with the part. During long hours she had studied it with the author, until they were completely at one. Philip felt that on her rested the whole success of the play.

He hardly saw Margaret at all. She did not belong to the world of the theatre, and thus she was out of Philip's own world. His doubts and difficulties he took to Wanda. Why not? They were wholly connected with the only matter his mind could hold. Margaret could not resolve questions like these. She could only sympathize.

Philip was not in the least in love with Wanda. He would have scoffed at the idea of woman holding any place in his life, save as subsidiary to his achievements. He was literally obsessed with one passion—to wrest

from New York the seal of approval for his work, since the world had agreed that such a seal was necessary. Wanda could help him more than any other woman to that necessary objective, and so her importance waxed, without the slightest sentimental admixture.

For this big opportunity he had worked. For it he had suffered. For it he was making Margaret suffer. When he could spare a few moments for self-examination, he admitted that. Naturally Margaret was too much alone. Naturally she missed the attention she had every right to expect. But it was only for a short time. A man cannot spend his life on his knees. Women must realize that work comes before worship, and honeymoon extravagance must give place to more or less humdrum economy of sentiment. But Margaret was such a splendid, understanding sort of old thing that she would thoroughly understand that he must give all his time and thought to the play and the people who were going to make the play. Why, think what it would mean! What if there were a little discomfort just now. It was natural that in the narrow corridor down which people crowded to that spacious, gracious hall of Success, there should be a little elbowing and jostling, a trifle of treading on other people's toes. And it was even possible they should lose friends in the press of the mob, but it would be all right in the big Hall. They would laugh over the squash, when they found each other again, and the annoyances of the corridor would be dismissed with a smile.

Wanda, on the other hand, found that her new man was not responding at all amusingly to the poking. He was the most sluggish of all her animals. He respected her, she perceived—actually believed in her. He had not even obliquely referred to Ferrero, and she was forced to the conclusion that he had never even speculated on the position the unpleasant little Italian held in her life. Not to speculate meant not to care.

Naturally, the effect of this was to annoy her to the point of madness. She made excuses to draw Philip to the little room with the crimson hangings, and con-

trived skilfully that Ferrero should find them there. Her plan was that Philip's eyes should be opened to a certain extent, and his interest stimulated.

If so, it failed, save with Ferrero. He smouldered slowly, but flame was long in breaking out. Apparently he recognized that the exigencies of the position gave Philip a strong claim on Wanda's time. But underneath his polite urbanity an intense hatred burned. In Philip's manner he sensed contempt. Probably the Englishman and his brethren in the Dominions have a more unfortunate manner with foreigners than any other race. It is difficult to prevent a faint suggestion of distaste for almost any foreigner creeping into their bearing. Ferrero saw it in Philip's, and his mind twisted it into an indication of the despite a successful lover has for his rival.

And, after his kind, he talked. In the Actors' Club he sneered subtly at Wanda, at Philip, at the play. Allusions, more or less veiled, began to creep into paragraphs. "Town Tattler" was forced to withdraw an insinuation. Insidiously a tiny snake of scandal crept about, and its poison began to work.

Margaret heard nothing of the whispers. She knew Philip to have an unusually high standard of personal honor. She suffered from the enforced neglect that his long absences entailed, of course; but not for one second did her fine, large mind hold one unworthy doubt that it was his work only which kept him from her. It was one of the penalties which dwellers on that restless highway—"Hurry-on Avenue"—must pay for their desirably exalted houses.

Philip had small time to spend on Ferrero and his works. The play was going worse than ever. Voinich was looking grim, and once had been heard to say that at the rate of progress they were making they would never reach the "try-out." Since "Benediction" had been withdrawn, it was quite possible that Voinich might put on something in its place, less full of risks than a halting "Game and Rubber."

It was almost wholly the fault of Acton St. Ledger.

Philip raged impotently. Once from the darkened and shrouded stalls he had called out a sarcasm so pungent as to make St. Ledger writhe. The others laughed. St. Ledger, with the pettiness of a little mind, meditated revenge. He made his plans.

Olney, whom Voynich regarded as his own personal and peculiar rival, was an unscrupulous man, and regarded any trick as justifiable if it disabled a foe. He was known as a trickster, and was admired by a section of the public, who gleefully speculated on "what raw one Olney was goin' to pull next."

St. Ledger went to a public telephone and called up the Olney Corporation Offices. Olney was in. In a few seconds he had made arrangements to pick him up in his auto, on the New Jersey side of the river. It was necessary that such a prominent Voynich actor should not be seen with the rival impressario.

They met. It did not take long to come to an understanding. Olney, shrewd, fat, flabby Olney, was the type of man that St. Ledger himself would develop into, when good-living should banish good looks, and they saw in each other kindred souls. It was arranged that when St. Ledger had done his part of the bargain, Olney should carry out his contract and give him a leading part in one of his shows.

Mutually satisfied, they parted.

Curiously enough, St. Ledger improved noticeably in his rôle, and Philip began to take heart of grace. He had got to the point of wishing that he had never taken up the work which made such exacting demands on nerves and temper. His old trick of irritability under stress had returned. But with the improvement in rehearsals this had not developed. Perhaps now he could give Margaret more of his time. She had long wanted to go away. The winter was playing up with her health. He wondered as he walked in a light flurry of snow, from the theatre, if he could take her farther South, and hurry back for the *première*. They could do without him now.

His face wore a smile as he went in to Margaret,

but no answering smile met him. She was looking white and worried.

"Phil, darling," she said, "when do you think we could get away?"

There was a note of acute distress in her voice that was new to her. She was wont to endure the necessities of the situation with a splendid philosophy that allowed no bitterness to escape her.

"Why, Margaret!" he exclaimed. "Is anything the matter? Not—not Peter?" he asked, hastily. Peter had left Australia two months before, and they had been waiting for news.

He noticed she was holding a letter in her hand, and a sudden fear that it might be bad news had struck him. For answer she handed it to him.

The snake had struck once more, and this time its poison was directed at Margaret. It was a hideous, beastly, anonymous letter, bidding Margaret look after her husband better. Wanda's name was mentioned.

"Of course, Phil, it's just gossip; but I hate—oh, how I hate this place! It is a city of Lies and Intrigue. Somehow I feel that I am surrounded by influences——" She broke off. "Oh, do tell me that you will go as soon as the play is produced. An agent can look after your interest, surely. I want my own country, Phil. Please, dear old boy, look at it from my point of view."

"I am, Margaret, I do. It's only for a little while. As for this"—he tore it viciously into pieces—"if I knew the writer, I'd flog him." He threw the scraps into a basket. Suddenly he caught sight of the envelope, a plain, white square. He took it in his hands, and held it up to the light. The water-mark was plain to be seen. His compressed lips tightened, and a look of dawning comprehension came to his eyes.

"The Actors' Club!" he said, and stopped, as though breaking off from a subject he was about to pursue. He put it in his pocket and went over to Margaret's chair.

"Is there any need to tell you that there is not

a word of truth in the whole vile suggestion?" he asked. She looked up at him proudly, and her arms went out.

"My dear!" she said simply.

He went down on his knees to her, his head on a level with hers. For a long second he looked deep into her eyes.

"There is no woman in my life but you, Margaret," he said, and his voice was vibrant with feeling and truth. "There never will be. I only wish to God I had a nature worthy of you. I know how often I have given you cause to regret having married me. But I love you, Margaret, in my selfish, thoughtless, neglectful way. I love you, and only you."

She leaned forward, her arms about his shoulders.

"I have never doubted it dear," she said. "But—Phil," she hesitated, "perhaps you don't understand individual woman as well as you understand women in the mass. I do wish you needn't see so much of Miss Lara. Yes, yes, I know it's the play," she said, hastily, seeing he was about to interrupt; "but she must know everything about Mrs. Devenage by now. It is only three weeks off the "try-out" Couldn't you let her see that—that it is only the play that brought you to her?"

"But she knows——," he began.

"Oh, you simple goose," smiled Margaret, tenderly. "No wonder some women gobble up your kind. Are you going to her to-night?"

"I had arranged to. We're going through Act Two."

"Then 'phone her and tell her you can't come," pleaded Margaret.

Without a moment's hesitation he went to the 'phone and sent the message through. Margaret smiled proudly. Had she needed proof, here it was to her hand. Philip belonged to her still.

At rehearsal next day, Philip's dawning hopes of better things received a check. St. Ledger was excellent. He seemed to be conscientiously trying to make up for his former shortcomings. It was Wanda who was the

delinquent. She sauntered through her part, wooden, exasperating beyond words. When Philip came up to the footlights to remonstrate, she listened with cool detachment to his remarks, and made no reply. A repetition of the scene brought no improvement.

"You're interpreting it all wrong," he told her, in a moment's privacy in the wings. "Mrs. Devenage would never take that point of view."

She looked at him with an impertinent air.

"You promised to go over that Act last night," she said. "I suppose that's why I failed to grasp it."

He certainly did not fail to grasp her meaning. She was punishing him for his defection.

"Dine with me to-night, and I will give you a chance to explain," she said, with an enigmatic smile.

In terror for further scamping of his work, he agreed.

It was the method she henceforth adopted for keeping him tied to her chariot wheels. Pure malice apparently was her motive, for pride would have forbidden her to use the manœuvre save for punishment. She could have got no pleasure out of such enforced company. Margaret did not ask him to stay with her again. Her pride rose up and sealed her mouth.

The holiday South was out of the question in the uncertainty of the circumstances. Voynich was pleased at the way the play was shaping, and Philip simply resolved to hang on till it was fairly launched, and then take a long rest somewhere with Margaret. One thing he had not told her. It seemed a cruelty in the face of her longing for home. He had signed a contract with Voynich to deliver another play in four months, and had been paid a fairly large sum in advance. This would necessitate at least six months further in New York. It would consolidate his position, he told himself, and he would be able to join up with a knowledge that Margaret's future was secure.

Then came the "try-out" in Baltimore. Margaret was not present. It was a success and Voynich rubbed his hands and predicted a long run. Advertisements began to obtrude themselves, and Philip found himself



being boomed as a "dark horse," who had "arrived." Curiosity about him was subtly aroused, and Voynich's press agent spread abroad the usual ridiculous *canards*.

That the public was curious the booking showed. The libraries reported advance sales for weeks ahead.

Philip was in a painful state of nervousness when the night arrived. At first he had resolved not to go to the theatre at all. Memories of Amanda clustered in his brain, and he felt that to undergo that slow realization of hostility would be beyond him. Let them tell him when it was all over what the result was, and he would be satisfied. Margaret felt inclined to agree with him, but she was excited and eager to go herself. Voynich had placed the proscenium box at the disposal of the author and his wife.

Human nature proved too strong to be resisted.

Philip waited till nearly eight o'clock before he yielded to an imperious desire to go and take what was coming to him, like a man, whether it were failure or success.

He entered the theatre, and stood behind the stalls barrier, surveying the house. So these were the judges, these smiling, nodding, shuffling people, gay and chattering as parroquets. Further aloft were more judges, with kola and popcorn a-plenty on the judicial bench, to help out the clarity of the verdict. His eyes turned to the box in which Margaret sat. She was white and still. Success meant to her not the applause and the praise and the newspaper cuttings, but the little nest of a home in South Yarra, where the dear home trees presented waving green tops to homesick eyes.

Ah! There was Voynich. Good Heavens! How excited he was! Surely he was inured to first nights by now. Still he was risking hard dollars; Philip only a reputation. That made a difference. Voynich was talking excitedly to Margaret, who spoke quietly in reply. The manager left the box hurriedly.

And there was Ferrero. How smilingly malicious the wretched little bounder looked! Like a cat which had just eaten a canary! By Jove, it must be nearly

time for a start. He looked at his watch. Past the half-hour. Still New York has a reputation for unpunctuality to maintain.

Jacobs hurried past, without seeing Philip, trouble in his eyes.

"Time they were starting, Jacobs," called Philip. Jacobs turned round.

"We're in a terrible mess," he said, in a low whisper. "Voynich has been looking for you—just 'phoned your hotel. Come round at once."

They hurried through a box, and gained the dirty narrow passage that gives access to "behind the scenes," that delectable paradise which only exists in the excited imaginations of those who have never visited it.

"St. Ledger hasn't turned up," wailed Jacobs, "There's a t'eatre full of people out there, and I've got to go and tell them that the performance can't go on. Ain't it jest hell?"

Philip looked at him stupidly.

"Not turned up? But—he's under contract," as if that would operate to produce him like a Habeas Corpus Act.

"He's done us—don't you understand? There's no message. He was in his Club at dinner-time, quite well, He's sold us—to Olney, Voynich thinks."

"But—Stretch, the understudy! He'll have to play. Oh, this will ruin it." Philip was facing a big crisis, and for a second it unnerved him.

"Stretch has gone, too. Don't you see the whole dope, Mr. Lee? Olney has been working to queer our pitch. St. Ledger doesn't love you much. You called him down too hard. And Stretch has probably been promised a better contract with Olney. Now we've just got to face the position—a postponement, and New York passing us the loud 'ha-ha.' You know what that means. No one will take this play seriously again."

But Philip had dashed off. Into Voynich's office he went on the run. Voynich was 'phoning, trying to locate Stretch, ready to offer him a better price than Olney. He turned a stricken face in Philip's direction.

"We're ditched," he said, and shook the 'phone, wiggling the hook, to hurry up his connection.

"By God we're not," said Philip. "I'm going to play the part."

"You! You're crazy," grunted Voynich. But he hung up the receiver, and swung round to look contemptuously at Philip.

"I can play it damn sight better than that beast St. Ledger," retorted the latter.

"What! Play a Broadway Theatre! Create a leading part in a new play! You couldn't play in a ten-cent, one-night-stand show. There's one thing to do—close down. Hugo Voynich never had to do it before, but I guess there's a hoodoo on this show. It was wished on me, and I deserve all that's comin' for weakenin'. But play an amateur! No, sir, you've got to guess again."

"I'm no amateur," stormed Philip; "I've played leads, and in Australia we've got audiences who know what's what a dam' sight better than your piebald Broadway crowds. Oh, can't you see I've got to, Voynich! It's ruin to me, any other way. Make Jacobs tell 'em some lie about St. Ledger. Olney would have the laugh on you properly if he forced you to close down. Isn't that just what he's after? I'm off to dress. My things are at the hotel."

He was gone, before Voynich could stop him. His last reminder about Olney was so true that it had taken the wind out of the manager's sails. He passed a trembling, fat hand uncertainly across his jowl, in unwonted perplexity. His small, piggy eyes had a hurt look in them. He had always won so easily. This check rattled him. Then he made up his mind to the experiment. It might defeat Olney; if it failed, the position was no worse.

Jacobs went on to announce the change in the cast. A murmur of disappointment rose from the crowded house, like the angry growl of a chained beast. Margaret felt the flesh at the back of her neck creep. How could Philip soothe this anger, which burst into quick,

excited comment? St. Ledger was a favorite. Part of the contract was that Voynich should give them St. Ledger.

With this huge prejudice to overcome, Philip took his cue and went on for his entrance. He had little to do in the First Act, and that little was unsympathetic. He played the part of Baring, a young British Secretary of Legation in one of the storm-centers of the Balkan States, who sells the contents of a State document, to get himself out of a mess, and clears out, ignorant that the blame has fallen on another official, whose carelessness has made it possible for access to be obtained to the document in question. The official, blundering, good-natured to the point of ineptitude, a diplomatic mis-fit, sees no way out of the disgrace but to shoot himself, and put an end to a life that has been a series of weak mistakes.

The sheer drama held the audience. They did not notice Philip. He was merely the indicating finger of Fate. It was the superb acting of the inept, middle-aged official which carried the Act through, unhelped even by the interest of a woman.

Margaret looked at the laughing stalls, and her heart dreaded the outcome. Could this carelessness be galvanized into that forgetfulness of self, which alone would understand the crisis?

In the Second Act Philip's chance came. Wanda, beautiful, a slender note of exclamation in a black velvet evening gown with diamonds glittering against it, roused the house to warm excitement, which reacted in Philip's favor. Their love-scene came—the woman whose elderly husband's death she has sworn to avenge, and the man who was responsible, now after ten years a useful, unselfish statesman, bringing to political fruition a plan in which Mrs. Devenage is deeply interested.

Wanda's voice, rich and musical, held her soul, as she gave her love to the man whose work she vowed to uphold. In her beautiful, giving hands she seemed to hold out to him that soul of her, for him to take. There

was no banality of stage-love in the scene—only sincere, wholesome, clean emotion.

They played the scene, as they had rehearsed it twenty times together. Neither had been satisfied with what St. Ledger got out of it. Now, keyed up beyond the normal, Philip wrung from it the last particle of feeling. A storm of applause greeted its conclusion.

It was all settled before the Third Act, with its appalling dilemma, came on. Philip had not only made a success of the play, but a great personal triumph for himself. His youth, his cleanness, his good looks, so different from the flabby sleekness of St. Ledger, made a tremendous impression on the most impressionable audience in America. A whisper had gone round that he was the man Wanda Lara had got mixed up with and a *succès de scandale* was superadded to the other.

The Third Act put the coping-stone to the edifice he had reared with such pains. He responded to the calls of "Author! Author!" with the keenest, sharpest emotion he ever remembered, since Margaret had come to him in another theatre and put her hand in his with a whisper that she would marry him whenever he wished. What he said to the shouting, roaring house he did not know. He recollected pushing back the curtain, and reaching out a hand for Wanda. Then the applause broke out like a tropical rainstorm on a tin roof, and he gave up all further attempt.

Voynich was in a frenzy of delight.

"Olney did me the finest turn," he declared over and over again. "Olney is my friend. He has made another fortune for me. St. Ledger! This man from Australia makes him look like an also-ran."

Margaret waited in the box, and in due time Philip found her there, waiting.

"Oh, Phil," she said, happily, her face radiant. She was think of the voyage she was about to take. Nothing now stood between her and home.

"I've got 'em, Margaret," he exulted. "And Voynich has ordered a second play, to be delivered in

four months. He's paid two thousand dollars in advance."

She looked at him stupidly. Her mind did not take in the significance of what he said.

"But you'll be in Australia, in camp, dear," she said. She tried not to notice the effect of her words. They wiped the happy, excited look from his face instantaneously.

She listened while he explained that he must consolidate the position so hardly won, that one play was not enough for a reputation, while her heart felt numb, and her hands went cold. She noticed that the men pulling the webbing over the seats in the empty theatre had pulled it crooked in one corner, and she wanted to call out and tell them. With an effort she brought her mind and her eyes back to Philip. How could she spoil his gay triumph with her disappointment? It was true; he had to consolidate his position. For a wife to be pulling him homewards eternally must be galling. He would end by detesting her. Her lips smiled at him, and she drew her cloak round her.

"I suppose such an important person must be allowed his own way," she said, and she heard her own laugh accompany the words. "But we'll have to go. They'll be closing the theatre."

They went out together. Philip had refused the supper Voynich wished to have for a celebration. In the street Margaret took his arm.

"It was simply wonderful, darling," she told him; "and you're going to be a famous person. But—Phil, after this next play, please—could I have my little home back?"

## CHAPTER XXVIII

*"Stopped in the straight when the race was his own!  
Look at him cutting it—cur to the bone!  
Ask ere the youngster be rated and chidden  
What did he carry, and how was he ridden?  
Maybe they used him too much at the start;  
Maybe Fate's weight-cloths are breaking his heart."*

—IN THE PRIDE OF HIS YOUTH

TWO things came to Philip in abundance—money and popularity. New York loves drama in real life, and that horrible hour when St. Ledger was waited for had impressed the people. The pluck of the dramatist in jumping into a leading part at a moment's notice just gave the necessary thrill to the situation.

Voynich, in high good humor, insisted on paying Philip the large salary St. Ledger had drawn, and in addition he was getting royalties, so a stream of dollars ran in a flood into his banking account. For the first time in his straitened life, since his father's death, he had command of practically all the money he wanted.

Another stream—a strong, racing, heady tide of social adulation, swirled and foamed around him, and in it he kept his feet with difficulty. He was not so successful in keeping his head.

Reporters besieged the hotel, avid for those private details which the American best loves. The mail brought shoals of invitations. Margaret grew alarmed, and begged to go away somewhere. The prospect of unending social wearinesses appalled her. Philip pointed out that until Voynich got a suitable Baring, he must go on playing. Finally, the matter arranged itself by the merest chance.

Away in the heart of the Jersey woods a Sunday auto run brought them to a lovely, old frame house, with

deep, recessed porches, and birch-woods screening it from the road. A picturesque, ice-bound brook drew an inky, wavy line across a snowy expanse of garden, and from the porches one looked across white lawn to wide meadows and tree-fringed river, which the hastening Spring would warm into green life and activity.

The roadster was one of Philip's first extravagances. A breathless run had caused a temporary stop while a hot engine cooled.

"Oh, Phil, what a dream of a place!" Margaret exclaimed. "I could be happy in a house like that."

Her clear, soft voice carried farther than she was aware in the still, winter air.

"Now, that's real nice of you," and around the corner of the house, a woman came, smiling in a friendly way. She had a round, happy, candid face, beaming with good humor. "Won't you folks come right in and give that auto a chance to rest?" she said, winningly. "Unless they've et them all, there ought to be some hot biscuits."

Philip lifted his hat.

"We are Australians," he said, "and we know just enough about your country to know that in a matter of hospitality you mean exactly what you say. But we wouldn't like to put you to any trouble. If only my wife could rest in a warm room a while——"

"Oh, pshaw!" she called. "No trouble at all. Don't cross there, or the lady will sink in the snow. Just back a piece there's a track."

Margaret and she fell in love with each other. Outside of books, Margaret had never heard anyone say "Pshaw!" Mrs. Jessop used the exclamation constantly to brush aside all objections to any proposition she advanced. Soon they were all talking as though they had known each other all their lives. How it happened, Margaret and Philip did not know, but when they went out to the waiting car, it had been arranged that Margaret was to come and board with Mrs. Jessop and her two pretty daughters at "Shadow Lawns."

For the first time since her arrival in the country, Margaret was completely happy. Philip would write



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his play, and in this delightful spot she could wait contentedly.

That matter disposed of, Philip was free to take up the life awaiting him, and savor the unusual delight of universal deference and admiration. The presence of Margaret had irked him slightly. His conscience was not quite at rest, and she was a silent reproach, however gaily she tried to disguise her feelings.

He was lionized, in that wholesale and whole-hearted way in which New York does things. At first the invitations were confined to the set which revolves round the White Lights, but as his winning personality became recognized, more exclusive circles took him up. It became an understood thing that there was an invalid wife in the background, poor thing—living somewhere in the country—no need to include her in the invitations.

For some time the work of his part kept Philip within reasonable bounds. He could not leave the city. Then a suitable man was found to relieve him. This was the opportunity he had proposed to himself for beginning the new play. He had sent a typewriter and a couple of reams of paper down to "Shadow Lawns."

But he had been drawn into a very maelstrom of social fixturs. He had the weakness that so often accompanies the popular man. He loved to please, but he loved to please strangers more than those whose attitude towards him he took for granted. With a thoughtlessness that hurt Margaret, he would telephone her that he could not come down; he had been caught by the Ruyters and could not offend them. That he offended Margaret did not seem to him to be nearly as important. Yet he would not have really cared if the Ruyters had all been translated of a sudden to Timbuctoo. He was in enormous demand. Week-ends at millionaire estates on Long Island, week-ends at golf at Tuxedo, a promise of a week in the season at Newport, an amateur play he had promised to stage in Greenwich Village, these were only a fraction of the engagements he had made.

Two months went by on wings. He had not written a line of the play. He seldom went down to Margaret.

Under her careful avoidance of the topic he read her opinion. It just seemed as if he could not bring himself to start his work. An enormous disgust for it had seized him, a complete revulsion of feeling. How could he possibly tread the long, hard, emotional road that had produced 'Game and Rubber?' Voynich said himself that it would run for a couple of years, and there were the English rights, for which a man was in treaty. There was no actual need for him to put pen to paper for at least two years.

He was tracing familiar thought tracks in his mind. It had been the sensation he had craved. His hungry ambition had driven him to the heights. What further remained but a series of more or less stale repetitions? Never again would he feel the same emotion at the sight of strained faces in opaque darkness listening to words he had penned made living and potent by the art of the actor. That had gone for ever. He watched them now without a thrill. It was as though he were looking at another man's work. As with the attainment of star parts had come a weariness with acting, so now had come a distaste for writing plays. There were plenty of other things worth doing. At present he was having the time of his life, and it was up to him to enjoy it while he could. A voice was ever in his ears, reminding him that there was a duty overseas waiting for him, but, when it became over-insistent, he plunged deeper into social waters. The stench of War was hardly able to reach him through the aroma of the sweet incense of flattery and adulation.

He smiled at the recollection of the fierce, singing delight he had felt on that far-away night, when the theatre rang with his name. Then he had resolved to press on. He had found himself. Fame, unlimited Fame, had come to him, and he had only to work in order to maintain his place on the narrow height, where the fresh, balmy breeze of popular applause blew so invigoratingly. He did not know that the steadier blows that breeze, the more enervating it is in its effects.

But the pinch of prosperity had nipped him with its

suggestion that he might snatch the benefits of success without the continuous effort necessary to maintain them. He went to Voynich. He had accepted an invitation to go down to Florida with a party for the end of the winter.

"I say, old chap," he began, "I can't do that play within the time we agreed. I've not had time to touch it yet, what with one thing and another. You'll have to give me a couple of months' extension."

Voynich looked at him.

"I paid you two thousand bucks in advance," he said, "and I expect you to come up to scratch. Time! You'd have had time if you hadn't been burning it with a bunch of Fift' Avenoo plutocrats."

Philip flared. He whipped out his check-book.

"Here's your two thousand," he declared grandly. "Now we're quits and I can please myself what I do with my time."

He handed the check to Voynich, who stared at him grimly, and slowly tore the check in half.

"You get busy on your contract, young feller," he said, "or I'm goin' to show you there's Courts can protect me. You can't get even with your obligations by repudiatin' them, not in this country."

In the end Voynich gave him the extension he required. A play written to order by a sulky author is not of much value.

Philip went to Florida. Margaret was not feeling strong enough to go, though he did ask her. With the idle, delightful people at Palm Beach, Philip played and swam and boated and danced, and not a thought of Voynich came to disturb him. He stayed a month.

On his return he went out to "Shadow Lawns." He thought Margaret looked uncommonly well. She smiled. Why bother him with ailments? He had to hurry back to New York. He was directing a pageant at Madison Square Garden, and was indispensable.

"But the play, Phil? You've only another month."

"By Jove, so I have. April's nearly over. How time flies. Oh, that's all right. Voynich will have to

give me a further extension." He was quite easy at the solution.

"But have you given up all idea of joining up, Phil?" she asked.

Anger smouldered in his eyes as he looked at her.

"Rather rum to hear you chasing me off to the War, Margaret, I must say. Of course I'm going to join up; but give a fellow a chance. I'm just at the point when I've got to be on deck here. Our whole future depends on how things go now. I've only this big opportunity once, and I owe it to you to——"

"For Heaven's sake, Phil, don't say 'consolidate your position,' or I'll scream. You poor old darling, don't you see you're having your clever old nut turned with all your social success? We read about you in the Sunday papers, and Norma is cutting out your photographs. She has over three hundred. Don't develop that line too much, dear boy, it's so bad for the sense of humor.

"I don't see what you've to worry about," he said, with dignity. "I've made a success after all. Other people think so, if you don't."

She looked at him reflectively.

"Do you remember the first time we met, Philip?" she asked him, soberly. "You spoke of your ambitions. You said you fought to win. It was the winning that intrigued you."

"I remember. Well, I've won."

"You also implied that when one world was conquered, you set out to conquer another—remember?" she inquired.

"With all the king's horses and all the king's men?" A smile at the recollection chased away his annoyance.

"Yes, and you said there was a suggestion of Humpty-Dumpty about that. I remember I thought at the time it was an uncomfortable sort of jumpy career, and implied a good deal of abandonment of conquered territory. Well, it has come to me lately, Philip, that I am part of the conquered territory. I *did* represent one of your fierce ambitions, didn't I?"

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"That hasn't changed," he said, sensing where she was approaching.

"I think it has. It changed very soon after I was conquered. You began on new territory. I displaced the stage, and your plays displaced me. Now you have got all you can out of them, and something else is elbowing them away—all this empty popularity is becoming to you almost a career."

"Oh, nonsense, Margaret. Is a chap never to have a bit of a holiday? Surely you'll admit that at least I have succeeded!"

"I have not quite made up my mind about that, Phil. You've succeeded up to a point. You've proved that you can write a popular play. But life means more than isolated achievements. You've built nothing up. You have shirked the big things in favor of a number of glittering trifles which mean very little in the lump. I've simply got to talk like this, my dear——"

"But I can't follow you at all," he replied, with an irritable shake of the head. Under correction he was always inclined to chafe. "All my man's life I have had before me one object—to win a name for myself——"

She interrupted him.

"Don't you see that's just the whole crux of the matter, Phil? You have wished to dazzle. The name of Lee must stand for something that glitters. But that isn't success. There's no stability about it. Fireworks make a noise and a flash, but for essential purposes they are useless. To me, watching you collect your forces after your big little triumph in the play and march off importantly in the belief that you have made your career, you are as pathetic as Humpty-Dumpty, only you don't know you are smashed yet. But you are, you are, unless you have the grit to seize life as a whole, and not just a shining piece of it."

"You don't help a fellow much, Margaret. All New York is talking of me, but you seem to see something humorous in me."

She laughed suddenly.

"I think I do, Phil. You're taking it all so seriously, except the part you ought to take seriously. I want you to keep on, and make a real success—consolidate your position, if you like," and she smiled at him with gentle raillery, but he did not respond. "What I don't like to see is all this tootling round with millionaires. That does seem funny to me, when you might be working on your contract and preparing to get back to Australia and what is waiting for you there. All these pictures in the papers seem humorous to me—sometimes. Other times they don't. Peter is not doing much social visiting, you see."

It was the hardest thing she have ever said to him, and it came from the depths of a nature that always sought his highest good. It cut her to see him wince with quick pain. But it seemed to her that a smart is sometimes salutary. It was such an unworthy thing that he should think achievement in life was a matter of witty after-dinner speeches, while the guns in Europe were calling in booming tones, and offering men careers which were worthiest when most greatly closed.

Philip left her, sore but shamed. Perhaps he was only a dazzling firework. Men's opinions and praises mattered to him infinitely more than they should. All that was finest in him rose to the surface when his brief anger had spent itself. But try as he would he could not bring himself to undertake the drudgery of Voynich's play. His interpretation of Margaret's meaning was that she despised such trivial employments, while real jobs were going begging in Europe. A desire rose in his mind for a place among his fellows. It was really the first tugging of a newer desire, the pull of a fresh opportunity. Even in his abasement, his mind functioned true to his nature.

He had been so beautifully unconscious of his recent attitude, till he had seen his reflection in Margaret's eyes—a cock on a dunghill. Unknowingly he had strutted; he had crowed, thinking he had a right to a deciding opinion. It was natural. And possibly, had there not been a War, Margaret would have considered

his gestures becoming. As it was they overshadowed his natural dignity.

In the next few days he saw a good deal of Wanda Lara. There he had met his old acquaintance, the great Ingleby, who had come over to arrange for a London production of "Game and Rubber."

"Ah, Mr. Lee, haven't we had the pleasure before?" he said, with urbane condescension, holding out two fingers. Philip maliciously gave him one in return, and pleasurably noted that he had scored. The necessity of completing the negotiations, which included the engagement of Wanda, brought about frequent meetings. Their names were coupled once more. The indifference he felt rendered him careless of appearances. The gossip did not reach him till the mischief was done. He had never ceased to believe in her, and that to her tact and magnificent acting he owed his position.

On the last day of April he wandered into the Actors' Club. He had lately become aware of a faint atmosphere of hostility. The Gallipoli Landing had been the theme of conversation of this last week of April, and war talk raged. Several English actors were in New York, whose presence the sensitive Americans resented.

When Philip entered the reading-room, there was a general nudging and winking and peering. He put no particular construction on this. He went over to the letter-rack, as was his custom, and idly scanned the notice board. As he looked, his glance became fixed.

A notice had been newly pinned to the board. This then was the object of all that pantomime. Behind him he was conscious of several smiling, furtive faces. He marveled at the taste which could allow such a black-guardly thing to remain in position. He put a hand inside the glass frame, and tore the paper down, crushing it in his hand. It ran:—

#### NOTICE.

#### TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN.

An offer has been made by a member of this Club to defray the passage (single) of any

Britisher who may be desirous of fighting for his country. France cannot do it all. The following are eligible:—

There followed a list of names, in which Philip's was prominent.

He faced the room gravely. It was Philip at his very best.

"I don't know the name of the scoundrel who put that up there," he said, cuttingly. "In England there is a thing called 'good form.' Some day it may reach New York, and you may then realize that such a notice as that could only have originated in a club outside a British country. There are six names on that paper. One is that of a man whose only son was killed three months ago; three others are over military age; the fifth was rejected as medically unfit, and I am left. I don't bother to defend my own position. Will any real man tell me who put that notice there?"

His quiet, even voice, without passion, but with scorn in every syllable, echoed in the quiet room.

"Why the hell don't you take advantage of the offer, an' go over, Lee?" Philip turned to the speaker, a man whose proffers of friendship he had turned down.

"That's my business, Archer. I'm not worrying about the insult to me. It's true in a way. I've been fooling here too long, and I admit it. But I do worry about poor old Moore. Will no one tell me who was responsible?"

There was a silence. St. Ledger grinned maliciously.

"Very well, I must take it to the Committee. Perhaps they won't father such a beastly thing."

He walked from the club. He was deeply moved. He knew he was not free from fault. He, and he alone of those six men, could have offered himself. He was determined to go back to Australia at once. He would give Voynich back his money, and pay a forfeit for the new play. Margaret and he must be able to look their friends in the face, at all costs.

He went to see Wanda. The anonymous letter to



Margaret had disclosed curious writing. He would know it again. The envelope had been of the distinctive kind that the Club provided for plain correspondence. The water-mark betrayed it. Now came this last thing, which was obviously meant for a stab at him. The perpetrator must have known just as he knew of the disabilities of the other men. It came into his mind that Ferrero might be responsible. The evil that looked out from his eyes was capable of anything. Lately he met him several times at Wanda's, and had noticed a hostility held in leash, as it were. Perhaps Wanda might be able to show him some of Ferrero's writing.

He found her alone. After some general talk on ordinary subjects, he broached the reason for his visit, in a casual way.

She went to a desk, and took out a note, which she handed to him. It was an invitation from Ferrero to supper. There was no possible doubt. Ferrero had written the letter to Margaret. In his own mind, Philip felt sure that he had been guilty of the other enormity.

He rose to go. Quite as an after-thought, he told Wanda of his pending departure. There came a quick change in her. She fought for self control, but words tumbled out of her—foolish words that betrayed what Philip had come to mean for her. She had come into the cage to the animal, instead of staying outside the safe bars. For the animal had taken no notice. Wanda had been piqued into a passion that took no account of anything but its gratification.

To say Philip was astonished would be a beggarly description. Luckily he was not put to the humiliating rôle of a Joseph, because interruption came. Wanda had taken hold of his hand as he rose, and had thrown the other arm around him, her face imploringly held up to him.

At this stage the door opened. In the emotional tension neither of them had heard footsteps. Roger Ferrero stood there a moment, looking at them with furious, mocking eyes. A diabolical smile indicated his interpretation of the situation.

"Ah, I interrupt. A thousand pardons," he said, and closed the door softly. Philip started after him, but Wanda's clinging arms impeded his progress, and he heard the elevator clang in the corridor. But he determined to seek the man without delay.

It was not easy to persuade Wanda that this was the only prudent course. She was full of terror at the outcome.

"Far better do nothing, Philip," she urged. "He terrifies me. There is nothing he will not do if he is driven to it."

"All the more reason to find him before the beast can open his mouth," said Philip.

He had not a word of reproach for the woman whose fault had thrust him into such an invidious position. *Noblesse oblige!* But in his inmost heart he wondered what imp drove women that they did such amazingly idiotic things.

An instinct led him to the club once more. It was a favorite lounging place of Ferrero's.

He was right. The man was laughing and talking with a couple of friends, over drinks. Philip sat down, keeping himself in control. If possible he did not want to make a scene.

One of the men broke into a laugh. Ferrero had been speaking in a low tone, with free gestures. The laugh that greeted his story was the sort that indicates only one thing—amusement at an obscenity. Philip pricked up his ears. The second man was speaking, after a deliberate stare around.

"Watch your step, Roger. He's mad enough to eat the guy that put up that notice," he said.

"What in hell do they want to come over here for, when they've got a man's job waiting for them on their own side of the water?" asked the first, in a voice which he did not trouble to keep low.

St. Ledger looked up with a chuckle. He was reading at one of the tables.

"Oh, it's a sort of wanderlust that catches 'em, just

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when Old Man Trouble is getting after them," he laughed.

Ferrero looked round, with a loud, high laugh.

"Wanderlust!" he exclaimed, giving the word its German pronunciation, like St. Ledger. "Ah, no, surely this is more a matter of Wandlust."

With a passionate fury Philip sprang to his feet and stood before the men.

"You low blackguard!" he said. "I suppose you were responsible for that notice, as well as for this last slander."

Ferrero blew an insolent smoke ring.

"I certainly am ready to pay my share of your passage money, if you will go and fight," he said, and smiled evilly.

Philip turned on his heel and left the building. He was raging dumbly.

He went into a store.

"I want a whip," he said, curtly.

"Yes, sir. A dog-whip or a horse-whip?" smiled the salesman.

"For a cur. A dog-whip—have you whalebone—I want it to last some time."

"The very thing, sir. We sell a lot of these."

Philip took the lithe, pliable thing, that would bend lovingly round a body, and thrust it, all unwrapped, into his pocket. Then, with rapid, purposeful steps, he strode back to the Club.

Ferrero was in the midst of a laughing story, sitting down, with four or five men standing round him. Philip broke into the group without ceremony. He seized St. Ledger by the shoulder, and thrust him aside. Then he jerked Ferrero to his feet with a hand that took a firm clutch on the collar of his coat.

The man's hands felt for Philip's throat, but fell away as rapid, flailing, cutting strokes fell on him. The short whip was a terrible instrument of punishment.

Luckily it is an instinct with men to allow two antagonists to fight out their battles without interference. The scream of mortal fear and pain Ferrero uttered

brought men tumbling from adjoining rooms. Excited, swaying, muttering, the crowd watched the most unmerciful thrashing they had ever seen administered.

Finally, with his arm aching from the unaccustomed exercise, Philip flung the screaming, tortured, sobbing thing away from him, and his strained, white knuckles tightened over the whip, as he faced the circle of men.

"That beast slandered a woman; he insulted five countrymen of mine who were enjoying your hospitality in this Club. In that he insulted you. There was a third reason, private between us both, and for the three I have taken it out of his hide. I suppose I have broken a few rules, so I'm going to resign. Has anyone anything to say to me?"

His flashing, challenging eye swept the inquiry round the crowd. Few would have cared to "say anything" to him, as he tapped the whalebone against his boot," with a most inviting expression on his face.

"I'm here to say he got what was coming to him, Lee," a man said, stepping forward. "There's a pestiferous bunch in this Club who have it in for you fellows. But please get this right. There's a hell of a lot of us who won't stand for a raw deal like Ferrero handed out to you. We go to you, and you treat us right, and, by thunder, when you come here, you'll be treated right. I'm a committeeman here, and I give you my word there will be an inquiry, and every last man concerned in that notice stunt will be expelled from this Club. Here's my fist on it."

Philip grasped his hand.

"Thanks, I'm sure of it. This is too fine a Club to let a few rotters spoil it. I'm just off home to Australia, and I want to thank you for the hospitality I've received. I won't have another opportunity."

He looked around him, nodded to a few acquaintances; then, doubling the whip in his pocket, left the room. Not for a long time had he felt such an exhilaration.

"Damn it; I believe I'm hankering for violence," he thought. "I feel keen to get at somebody else. I hope

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this lasts till I get to the Germans. It'll be no end of a lark."

With the satisfied, jaunty swing of a happy man he walked down Broadway in the direction of the shipping offices.

## CHAPTER XXIX

*"How far from St. Helena to the Gate of Heaven's Grace?  
That no one knows—that no one knows—and no one ever will.  
But fold your hands across your heart and cover up your face,  
And after all your trappings, child, lie still."*

—A ST. HELENA LULLABY

**T**HAT evening Philip spent with Margaret. He had taken passage back to Australia, and conceived the thought of giving his wife a surprise. Somehow she seemed nearer to him than she had been for months. It was as if his brain had been swept of a miasma, and was enabled to take cognizance of the sweet, clean things of life once more.

As he drove through the little, fenceless suburb whose gardens were just showing green patches through the melting snow, something of the joy and the spirit of the Spring that had come descended on him. Buds were bursting on the avenue in that magic way which so thrills the visitor from the warmer southern lands.

Margaret welcomed him with warmth, in which was a tinge of surprise. He was in magnificent spirits; with a laugh of sheer pleasure he seized her and held her up, kissing her in quite the old, lover like way, as he released her. Mrs. Jessop and Norma bustled about in preparations for his supper.

"First Single for Contentment Road! Hurry up, there! Take your seats!" he chanted.

She looked at him wistfully.

"Oh, Phil! Don't!" she begged.

"Oh, but I mean it. Here, catch hold!" He tossed the precious document to her, and she read it with incredulous, joyful eyes.

"But—but——," was all she could say. Then she sprang up and launched herself at him.

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"If you aren't the dearest thing!" she cried, and hugged him with rapture. It was the keynote for the evening. It passed in laughter and badinage. Norma's dark beauty glowed with the joy of having the great man so entirely to themselves, and Margaret was like a schoolgirl.

Philip could not stay. He went to see Voynich on the morrow and wind up all his business. In two days they must be on the way to Vancouver to join their boat. Margaret made no attempt to keep him. Sufficient unto the day was her joy.

Not a word had Philip uttered with regard to the incident of the afternoon. That was closed. Only his utter folly had brought it about, and of that he had made an end. The thing could be buried in oblivion. He was extremely unlikely to meet Ferrero again. As for Wanda, he would 'phone his farewells.

He switched on the light in his sitting-room, leaving the door open. The clock showed it was midnight. Just as he was about to go into the bedroom, he noticed the letters which had come by the evening delivery. Idly he ran them through his fingers. They were mostly invitations—pretty, fantastic, scented envelopes. Yesterday they would have brought him pleasure. They were a part of his triumph. Now he tossed them aside. When the functions to which they bade him were in full career, he and Margaret would be swinging along on the Pacific, nearer and nearer to the Southern Cross. Then he noticed that one of the missives was a cablegram. Peter jumped to his mind. In those evil days, for ever gone, a cablegram was a thing of ill omen.

He opened it, with dark foreboding.

"Regret advise you Sir Arthur Lee killed in action Gallipoli. We await your instructions in this matter. Suggest you cross to London immediately. Wiseman and Cranch, Solicitors, Devonshire Square, Bishopgate."

"Arthur!" He uttered the name aloud, in his sudden shock. It was a curious circumstance that in all

the speculations he had made on the changes the War was to bring to him and his friends, this most likely possibility had never occurred to him. His eyes smarted. His cousin's boyish face had suddenly swum into his vision. In his ears he heard, almost as though Arthur were in the room, the familiar drawl—"Oh, absolutely!" Dead! The significance of the immense blood-offering on those cliffs of Anzac came bitterly home to him with the news of the passing of just one Englishman.

He looked at the cablegram again. Who were Wiseman and Cranch? Solicitors! Why cable him? How had they known where to send? Of course Arthur knew. He and Margaret had written regularly. Why, good God! Of course! He was the heir. It seemed an incredible thing in the retrospect that neither he nor Margaret had ever spoken of that possibility. Arthur's heir! Did one ever think of heirs in connection with a youngster in the full flush of health? Poor old Margaret! This would cut her up terribly. She had simply adored the chap. Her busy hands were forever knitting, either for him or Peter. A step made him wheel round sharply. A man walked into the room, a youngster with an elert, impudent, acute air, who kept his hat on.

"I'm the *Chanticleer*, Mist' Lee, and I gotta get some dope from you, if you'll talk for publication."

His steady eyes coolly looked Philip from toe to head, in a long unwinking stare.

Philip knew the paper, one of the Yellow group. Some people thought it sparkling. If it possessed that quality, it was the glitter of the phosphorescence that putridity makes. It was formed to exploit the sorrows, the sins, the mistakes of men and women. It had many imitators, but none could approach it in unblushing effrontery, in its execrable taste, in its shameless perversions. It made a merit of telling the whole story in its headlines.

"I have nothing to say," said Philip.

The youngster smiled. Then his eye caught sight of the cablegram, lying within his close view on the table. With the colossal impudence, of which only his class in



his own country could be capable, he calmly read it, and remarked:

"When we're through with this other affair. I gotta get something on that. Looks kinder intrestin'. Now, about this Ferrero stuff. Where do I get off?"

"Through that door," replied Phillip. "I told you I had nothing to say. Clear out!"

"Say, you've got me all wrong. Do you think I c'm go back to the boss, an' tell him I quit 'cos I got a tap on the wrist? No, sir! I come prepared for a bit of rough-housing, like you gave Ferrero. Say, I'm goin' to tell you I'm strong for you. 'Stime someone steered that bum up agin real trouble. Lemme make it easy for you, Mist' Lee. We gotta lot of stuff from the Ferrero end of it, and it's real kind of us to give you a chance to come across with your side. Huh? What about it?"

Had Philip been wiser he would have met the reporter on his own ground, and talked the whole thing out. The New York journalist is very susceptible to a "man-to-man" attitude. Treat him well and he'll treat you well. Philip took the umbrage his British training enjoined. To him a man who interfered in a private matter was a bounder, and in an Englishman's code, to be a bounder is to earn the maximum of contempt.

"Publish what you please and be damned to you," he said. "I'm going to give you half-a-minute to clear out of this; then I'm going to get into action."

Not a muscle moved in the face of the youth.

"That's all right then," he said; "I just got half a minute to get the strength of that wire. Sir Arthur Lee! Relation of yours that would be, now?" He cocked his head on one side, in an enquiring way.

Philip turned his back on him. Quick as thought the reporter bent down and read the cablegram to fix it in his mind.

"Father?" he suggested. Philip's back was uncompromising.

"Easy look him up in your pedigree book," remarked the *Chanticleer* man. "Reckon from this you've got a finger in the pie the lawyers are cuttin' up. Make

a story of it, anyhow. Well, I guess this will ease the old man, when I come lopin' in without the Ferrero dope. Only you won't like what we're printin'."

"Get to blazes out of this!" stormed Philip, at the end of his resources of patience.

"I'm off," said the other, easily. "You British is sure clams when it comes to shootin' out an explanation. Well, sleep sound; you'll need it."

Ferrero's first action, when he reached his hotel, whither he had been conveyed by St. Ledger, had been to call up the *Chanticleer* office, and ask them to send a man along. Then he told his story, skilfully and at length.

A few garbled facts about Margaret completed the ingredients of this hell's brew. She was living apart from her husband, said Ferrero. His licentious life had disgusted her, and she was about to sue for a divorce.

The reporter went away to get Philip's story. His absence at "Shadow Lawns" postponed the interview.

It was balm to Ferrero's wounds to know that in the morning Philip would be pointed at and shunned, and he well knew his adopted nation, when he planned his revenge. Not even the British are so fiercely moral as the American people. In New York there is a periodicity about these attacks of propriety. The idea seems to be that immorality may injure the individuals concerned, but scandal and discovery injure the nation. Moral Comstocks armed with baldish brooms every now and then emerge from the City Hall and make Partingtonian dabs at the ocean of depravity which leaves the shores of the city. The ocean is not seriously disturbed, but the Comstocks derive intense gratification from the forays.

There was a separate portion of his revenge which Ferrero did not mention to either the reporter or St. Ledger. Wanda Lara was his property, bought and paid for. In his own way, he prized this woman. He, and he alone, had had the courage to laugh at her rebuffs—to rush her defenses—to master her completely. She had acknowledged his property rights in her. For him

her pale face had reddened under his kisses. Yet she had thought that he might be discarded like these Yankees; that he would tamely accept his dismissal, when Lee came along. With the clear vision his knowledge of her gave him, so different from the superficial acquaintance which was all she had vouchsafed to others, the Italian saw that Lee had touched her heart. Never before had Ferrero to wait on her convenience; never had she dared to show him a complete disdain. Yet she had done both these things since Lee had come into her life. It was clear that she had played him false. She must be punished. What would break Lee would not touch her. An actress can still charm, with or without a reputation. Something different must be devised for a faithless woman. All the passion in his tempestuous mind rose and clouded his judgment. His was the temperament that brings about newspaper tragedies. Melodrama—excitement—publicity—all these make an irresistible appeal to a mind in which intelligence only exists to subserve the call of the senses.

When Philip came down next morning to breakfast the whole false, malicious thing was blazoned on the front page of the *Chanticleer*, in the huge headlines the paper affected. He realized the hideous mistake he had made the night before in not talking to the reporter and insisting on the truth being printed. Now it was too late. This damnable travesty would go broadcast over America; would be reprinted abroad. The Australasian News Service had already cabled the news to his own country, no doubt. He would be branded as a man who fooled round with women, while his country was fighting for its existence.

With burning eyes he read the interview with Ferrero. He saw the description of the interrupted tête-à-tête, and wondered bitterly if the thing could possibly have looked even colorably like that to a third person. Then came the story of the thrashing, headed "Fracas at Actors' Club," and supported by several eyewitness stories.

It was cleverly written. With ingenious subtlety the

paper had confined itself to the actual facts, but had used Ferrero and his "allegations" to make the obscene suggestions that covered the whole episode with infamy. With a heart on fire his eye caught sight of a paragraph that brought him to his feet with an imprecation. He felt as men feel when they take life—take it gladly, stamping out a thing too vile to live. So he would have treated Ferrero, at that moment. For he had just read that Margaret had been forced to leave him, and was living by herself, pending a divorce. It was not given as a fact, but again as an "allegation."

The elevator boy's black eyes sparkled with curiosity as he shot the famous Mist' Lee up to his floor. The boy knew all about it.

Philip stumbled into his room, and shut the door.

"God in Heaven! What can I say to Margaret?" he whispered, aloud, the disorder of his mind forcing the words.

Hunched in a chair, his head on his arms, he went through his Gethsemane. He could contradict the story; he might bring suit against the paper, though they had protected themselves; he might horse-whip the black-guardly editor. But would anything he could do prevent Margaret's innocent eyes from reading that appalling tissue of suggestions?

It was to this he had brought her. She had been so serene and happy, in that pretty room at Mrs. Chuff's, with her friends and her miniatures. He had broken up that existence; had forced her with his damned, whining importunities to take pity on him, and marry him. What amends could he make? What amends were even possible?

He began to examine himself. He was face to face with his naked soul. He understood that tinsel and glitter had been his ambitions. Never once in his life had he asked himself to what good use he might put it. On no single occasion had he thought of achievement in relation to others. Always it had been personal to himself, bringing this money reward, and that meed of admiration. He had been greedy of men's praise, never

of their good. Every page of the world's book had had its interest for his insatiable curiosity. His twitching fingers had been impatient to turn them, one after another. How like a small boy he had been, in his "showing-off." His attitude had been that of the braggart—"I'll bet I could do that!" The picture that came before his miserable eyes was dark and unattractive. "Unstable as water thou shalt not excel." That was it! Instability and weakness, ostentation and pride! There was he, Philip Lee, in little. How pathetically little, too! Margaret had been right, after all. Humpty-Dumpty had come to glorious smash, and had carried her with him.

His fingers gripped the paper convulsively. As misery will notice trifles quite outside the treadmill of wretched reflection, he noticed this name in unfamiliar guise, sprawling across a column—"Sir Philip Lee." So the reporter had worked it out. Sir Philip Lee! Arthur had died gloriously and had left the title covered with honor in England; did he know how it had been covered with mud in New York?

He roused himself after a while. He must do his best to overtake the lie. There were cables to send. He must see the head of the Australasian News Service and give an authoritative denial. He must cable London and get Wiseman and Cranch to keep it out of the English press, a comparatively easy task, when the press acknowledges some sense of responsibility. Then he must see Ferrero and force him to contradict. He would drag him to the newspaper office, if necessary.

He hurried out, leaving a message that he would be back at twelve. Thus it happened he missed Margaret's telephone message.

She would not have seen the infamous article, as the Jessops would sooner have allowed a snake into their decent home than the *Chanticleer*. But she had volunteered to do some house shopping for Mrs. Jessop that morning, and had gone into a news agent's in the town for some postcards to send Peter.

There, under the eyes of the salesman and his assistant,

Margaret had caught sight of the flaring headlines, in red ink that challenged the gaze. For a moment she thought she was about to faint, but her pride caused her to summon every atom of her resolution, and she read the story through. Not by a quiver did she betray the fact that she was an interested party. She saw the blackguardly suggestion about herself, and smiled with relief. *Expede Herculem*. By this over-reaching absurdity she was enabled to judge the malice of the whole thing. Her mind was as clear as noonday. While Philip was drifting in an agony of abasement towards shoals of inefficient violence, her woman's intuition, and an amazing woman's pluck, which would venture even humiliation to clear Philip's name, were pointing the way to her.

She began with a promise, from which her mind never moved. The tale was a fabrication. Philip might be weak, he might be lost to a sense of proportion in life, but he was as clean in mind as a child. That old, long past incident of Mazie Sefton had been on a different plane. She had lived with Philip long enough to know that a certain fastidiousness of mind went with a fastidiousness of body. This ugly incident was impossible for him as for herself.

On that she built her plan. Since the story was false, one person besides Philip could prove it to be so. Wanda Lara had every reason for disproving the imputation which rested on her equally with Philip. Wanda's denial could of itself carry no weight, but if Margaret, supposed to be living apart from Philip, and nursing a grievance—if she, who might be expected to welcome additional evidence against her husband, were to appear with Wanda, and with the full weight of her position denounce the whole thing as a malicious falsehood, their very alliance would give the death-blow to the scandal.

Naturally she shrank from the ordeal. Wanda Lara was not a woman she cared to go to for favors; still, there was no earthly reason why she should not collaborate with her under the circumstances. Anyhow,

her own prejudices were as nothing, when the question of saving Philip's reputation was considered.

She gave herself no time for more reflection. She had seen a way, and she made straight towards it. She was ever set against finding direction out by indirection. She telephoned Philip at his hotel. He was out. She caught the first train to the city, and went to his rooms. He was still absent. There was no time to be lost. The joint denial should appear in the evening papers, if possible.

She meant to telephone to Wanda, but a second's thought deterred her. The girl would be in at this time, just before the noon hour. Something might urge her to refuse to see Margaret, if warned of her coming. As she stepped from the hotel vestibule to the pavement a storm of rain began, which turned to snow, one of the last falls of the season, Winter's last defiance to Spring. A bell-boy hailed a taxi, and she asked to be driven to the Plaza Hotel. Up the crowded, wet Avenue she whirled to the Park.

Had she known him by sight, she might have seen Ferrero, sitting patiently by one of the palms, waiting. Wanda had gone out, and he was watching for her return.

Margaret did not ask at the desk, for the same reason as prevented her from telephoning. She knew the floor, and the room number, and went straight up. She was trembling now, but her purpose in no way faltered.

The maid, who came in reply to her knock, informed her that Miss Lara was out for a little while, but was expected any minute. Would Madam wait?

Margaret entered the rosy room, and took a seat at the farther end. The sudden storm had obscured the room, and the maid switched on the electrics with an apology.

"Oh, please, no," begged Margaret. The sudden radiance made her shrink. She could not bear to sit and wait in that light to face Wanda.

She had left a note for Philip—a cheerful, loving note,

which told him she would be back to lunch with him. It bade him cheer up; that she would fix everything.

Philip came back at twelve, as he had arranged. On his table was Margaret's note. He read it with a quick stab of pity for her and an immense appreciation of her trust.

"By Jove, what a sportsman!" he thought. Then his brow furrowed in thought. She had come in for a purpose. She was going to make it all come right! Where had she gone? What was she about to do?

He hurried downstairs. The elevator boy remembered the lady who had gone to his rooms. Oh, yass, suh! She had asked Albert to whistle her a taxi. It had started to rain, just befo' de snow come. Yass, suh! Albert was out'n de hall, near de desk.

Albert remembered the lady. She had given the driver orders to drive to the Plaza Hotel.

So that was it! Wanda! Margaret must not be allowed to mix herself up in this unsavory mess. He hurried out of the hotel, and as fast as car could drive in the traffic, sped to the Plaza.

His quick, nervous manner, his questing look round the lounge, were not lost on Ferrero, still waiting. He watched Lee walk to the elevators, and a sudden suspicion darted to his brain. The maid had told him Wanda had gone out. What if she lied? What if she were waiting for Lee? They would naturally be planning what they would do in the circumstances.

He jumped up, and in his turn made his way to the elevator, not two minutes after Philip had ascended.

Philip entered without ceremony, after the briefest of knocks. He had no doubt he would find Wanda and Margaret together, and he was on that footing of intimacy which allowed the freedom.

In the gloomy light, he distinguished Margaret at the other end of the room. At his knock she had risen. When she saw it was Philip, she spoke.

"How in the world did you find me?"

"You must come away, Margaret. I don't want you mixed up in this business. You've got to suffer, I



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suppose, through my idiotic fault, but at least you need get no deeper into it than you are already."

His tone showed something of the self-scorn he was suffering, and her heart went out to him, as it always did when he was troubled.

"Oh, my dear, as if you and I need to care for a thing like that! No one would ever believe it—no one we cared about. Would Peter or Arthur ever trouble their dear old heads over it?"

"Arthur!" Then she did not know. "Margaret I got a cablegram this morning, or rather last night. I've bad news for you."

"Not—not Peter?" she said, with white lips.

"Arthur. Killed at Gallipoli."

She gave a little cry of distress. Then she was silent. But the strain of the morning, with this superadded, had been almost too much for her. She was still standing, looking at Philip with wide, tearless eyes. It took all her will-power to keep going. She heard his voice explaining things. It seemed to come from an immense distance.

The door opened stealthily, but with a creak that made Philip turn. Ferrero stood there looking at them.

"Ah, my dear girl, I have come to prove to you that I can take care of my property," he said, gently, and raised his arm.

Philip saw something gleam dully in his hand. It is an exceedingly difficult thing to make a law-abiding, normal man understand that melodrama is something which is merely transferred to the stage from real life—the most real form of drama there is. It was simply incredible that there, in that shadowy room, not ten paces away, a man was standing intent on taking life. It could not be. For long seconds it seemed that the sinister arm was pointing something at Margaret; seconds before Philip could find his voice. The madman clearly thought the woman in the gloom was Wanda. Outside the snow was falling in a pitiless winding-sheet that muffled all traffic. It swirled against the windows, which it covered with flaky opacity.

"It's my wife, you fool," Philip called, in a husky, strained voice that appeared to come from a third person. He was still near enough to Margaret to touch her. As he spoke he put out his hand and shoved her violently away from him. She landed in a huddled, breathless heap, on the chair, from which she had risen at his entrance. As she fell, the shot rang out. Philip saw that long before he could traverse the intervening space a second shot would follow, and this time could not miss the sitting figure of his wife. There was only one thing to do. He saw the upraised arm, and the black, crazy, glittering eyes. Then he jumped. Into the line of fire with his back turned to the death behind him, and his arms thrown in a covering protection around Margaret, who was unconscious, he threw himself, and the second shot was fired.

He moaned slightly, and his body drew itself in sharply. His arms relaxed their protecting hold, and his head slipped on to her breast.

"Margaret——," he whispered, and again more faintly—"Margaret." It was a groping of the spirit for help and comfort. But she did not hear. The scared maid rushed in and sped away again. Only that feeble "Margaret!" sighed through the darkening room. Outside the soft snow drifted noiselessly past. Then he, too, grew silent.

## CHAPTER XXX.

*"I'd not give way for an Emperor,  
I'd hold my road for a King—  
To the Triple Crown I would not bow down—  
But this is a different thing.  
I'll not fight with the Powers of Air,  
Sentry, pass him through!  
Drawbridge let fall, it's the Lord of us all,  
The Dreamer whose dreams come true!"*

—THE FAIRIES' SIEGE

FRIENDLY lights of Sydney in the hour before dawn! The cheerful, winking welcome from the lighthouse on South Head! The Southern Cross suddenly invested with the magic of an exclusively Australian constellation! There were many besides Margaret, who could not sleep on this last morning. Many other eyes smarted with the salt of happy tears. Those lights meant Home—safety—the comfort of friends.

That couldn't be Peter! But it was! Peter, with the same cheerful smile that annihilated the years between them. It was an eternity until they were allowed ashore. She came to meet him, half crying, half laughing. Conventionally they shook hands.

"Hullo, what's this you've brought?" said Peter.

"A British citizen, almost new," she replied.

"I'm Philip Peter Egerton Lee," said the new citizen, "an' I'm two an' a bit. What's your name?"

"Just Peter," was the reply, "and I'm turned five, so that beats your measly two and a bit. But you'll grow."

He was hurrying the formalities through as fast as possible, and in the intervals of waiting he conversed with Philip the younger. Somehow he could not speak

to Margaret. He took refuge from embarrassment in inconsequential banter with the boy.

"Shall I catch up?" the youngster inquired.

"Shouldn't wonder," said Peter, and swung him to his shoulder. "There, you're bigger than I am, anyway."

He turned to a cabman.

"These to the Wentworth," he ordered, and with the child perched on his shoulder he led the way out to the street. In the taxi he spoke to Margaret, practically for the first time.

"I've got the dowager at the hotel. Mrs. Redfern is down with rheumatiz, and Dr. Payne is there night and day, so I thought you'd better have the next best. And a real old sport she is! Just stopped long enough to put Gertrude into cold storage, and the cat out of the flat, and there she was."

Margaret did not seem to be listening. She fixed her eyes on Peter's left arm. He wore a glove on that hand. Gradually the significance of it was dawning on her.

"Peter—you didn't tell me," she said, and her heart surged with the pathos of it.

He moved the arm up and down.

"The very finest made," he smiled. "Here, don't cry, old girl. Far better stop one with your arm than with your head. It's all in the game."

"Why didn't you tell me?" she asked. His apparent indifference braced her.

"Time enough; you had your own troubles," he replied. "I don't care—much," he finished softly. "Oh, I forgot to tell you. The dowager and I thought it was not much chop coming to Sydney just for a week-end, so we took a cottage for a month, on spec. Just had a notion that you and Sir Walter Raleigh here might be the better of a dose of sun and air and sea. Rather a decent little crib—on the coast. Doesn't it strike you that Australia's a nice little hole, taken all round?"

She breathed deep of the sparkling, tangy air.

"Worth fighting for, Peter?" she asked.

"Just about," he said. "It'll do me, if some of these

talky-talky gentlemen of the soap-box and the pulpit will stop poisoning the atmosphere. It's taken a lot of trouble to hold it; I reckon we've got the right to run it, now. Anyway, we're going to."

As Peter had foreseen when he arranged it, the month on the lovely coast braced Margaret sufficiently to enable her to take up her life in Melbourne without too poignant memories.

She found a sunny nook, half-way up the sloping cliff, silver-gray with its dress of sage. To this aery she would climb, when she wanted to think out the future. The dowager, in solitary dignity, sat on a lower level where the sun could not scorch the complexion she still valued so highly. As for Margaret, she could not get enough sun. Two shivering English winters had succeeded New York blizzards, and English sunshine, even in beautiful June, seemed but a pale imitation of the real thing.

On the last day of her holiday, she sat in her favorite seat. A book lay on her lap, unopened. Her mind was busy. What fiction could hold her, after the realities of England? Her problem was the future of her boy. Was Australia or England to have the shaping of him? For herself, the title meant nothing—less than nothing. It was merely the dazzle of tinsel. But there were huge responsibilities awaiting the wee man in England, when the little fists grew big enough to grasp them. Would she be doing right to make of him something which would bring an alien mind to the solution of peculiarly English problems? Or would Australia's breadth not be a splendid school?

It was not a question of love for either country. England had grown inexpressibly dear to her. She had come there, filled with a personal sorrow, which blatant publicity had given a touch of vulgarity. She had shrunk from the notice of her kind. But England had held out to her tender hands, and said—"Come! See how I, too, am suffering."

She saw something she had never even dimly con-

ceived. The grieving heart of a nation! The noble dignity of bereavement that has given gladly! In the face of this tragic accumulation of sorrow, her own suffering seemed petty and unworthy. Australia had been her constant thought—the land of lands. Her heart ached with consuming homesickness. But in the face of what she was then seeing, her own country took on another aspect. It seemed indefinitely removed from her—almost indifferent to the sublimity of sacrifice in which her own sons were so gloriously involved. The echoes of clamorous nonentities seemed the voice of Australia, and what an unworthy voice! She read of strikes which prevented the loading of ships, and she burned with shame; she saw reports of a priest, a leader of his people, who derided the cause for which thousands of his co-religionists had died in splendid service; she heard his base slanders against a people among whom she was living in a constant wonder of gratitude and love, and she was forced to lower her eyes in shame that the name of her country should be dragged in the mud by the wretched, cowardly few who shouted "Advance Australia," even while they pulled her down.

And she learned her lesson. She who had wished to be an Australian more than anything else, discovered that it is impossible to be a good Australian unless one has learned first to be a good Briton. The greater includes the less. She had, like hundreds of thousands of her countrymen, discovered at first hand the greatness of Britain, and the grandeur of her Empire.

She had worked beside her sisters for three years, giving with both hands of her immense resources to all kinds of War necessities. Then the Canadian Government had found a way through the travel restrictions and had made her path smooth. Lady Lee, the richest woman in England in all probability, owner of Welsh coal mines and Cornish pitchblende deposits, was a personage to please.

She had come home.

Far below her Peter came into sight on the sands,

and her reverie ended. A smile came to her lips, and for a moment the old, veritable Margaret came back. She watched a pair of stout little heels digging Peter unmercifully in the ribs, making him prance and caracole like a very thoroughbred.

She rose and went down to them. Peter bucked the baronet off, tossing him on his august back in the sand, and strolled to meet her. After him panted young Philip, to be presently caught up in his mother's strong arms.

"Let's sit down," she commanded. Peter dropped obediently beside her. The youngster wandered off on a voyage of discovery.

"He's very like Phil," said Peter, turning to her. She was silent. "Does that hurt you, Margaret?" he asked.

"No, I'm glad. He has just Philip's trick of looking up in a challenging way, if I check him—Philip to the life."

"He can't take after anyone better," Peter ventured.

"How you loved him!" she said.

"He was the best thing in my life," explained Peter, simply. "Do you think you could bear to tell me about it—some day?"

There fell a silence. Her voice was uncertain when she replied.

"Some day, Peter. The worst part was not being able to speak to him at the last. I have a haunting feeling that I failed him. I was like a stupid, fainting school girl, and I left him to die alone——" Tears came then, but she tried to talk through them. Peter rose, calling to the boy, and walking after him.

When he went back, she was quiet. She smiled at him.

"He made his name," she said, "and that was what he wanted. When he said he'd do a thing, he always did it," she added, proudly. Woman like, she was idealizing the quality she had formerly condemned.

"Yes. That was Phil, all over." There was a diffident note in his voice, as he continued.

"Margaret, I thought you might like to know that

all—that—blackguardly business cabled out here—well, Ingram killed it. He knew Phil, and he just got busy and stopped its publication. You see it came first via Vancouver, our own exclusive service, so he was able to kill it before the ordinary London cables came through."

"Will you thank him for me, Peter?" she said, gratefully. How she had feared the explanations she would have to make in respect of that very thing.

"I never felt easy in my mind about you, ever since I got that letter from 'Hurry-on Avenue,'" he continued, with a nod that dismissed the other subject for ever. "You, of all women, in 'Hurry-on Avenue!' Was it as bad all the time?"

"It needn't have been so bad, if I'd only had a little sense," she said. "I was a cat, Peter. I saw Phil's success through the most jealous, narrow slits of eyes you can imagine. The war filled my thoughts. Everything lost its proportions. I might have remembered that to him his triumph was an earnest of his ability. He had proved his right to stand among the big people. I—I sneered. I'd just give everything I possess now to recall that sneer."

"I somehow can't get a picture of you sneering at anyone," he objected.

"That proves you don't know me. There's mud when you get far enough down into the essential Margaret Lee."

"Nile mud, then," he replied, "fit for strength and fertility. I won't listen to slanders against you."

He smiled, and unconcernedly picked pebbles from the sand, and threw them aimlessly at inoffensive rocks. He had an almost overmastering longing to take her in his arms and hold her close from all depreciation, even her own. Day after day, the sweetness and greatness of her were making her more desirable; but a certain large graciousness in her seemed to remove her far from the littleness of passion. He kept silent. A man must be far more conscious of worth than was Peter Wister to offer to take the place of Philip Lee.



As he jerked ineffectual pebbles, Margaret studied his face. The line of the jaw was strengthened, since he had become a soldier. His eyes showed to her something of the tragedy of the sights they had witnessed on the rocks of Anzac and the French battlefields. He only smiled with his lips, she noticed. Too many visions filled the eyes for mirth to rise so high.

Peter was an open book to her. She read plainly the determination he was schooling himself to observe. She had known of his love when she had left him nearly four years ago. He had crushed it down then, and he would crush it down always.

Mrs. Lee came, with gingerly steps, down the cliff and walked towards them. On the way she collected her grandson. Margaret held out her arms for the boy, but the autocrat refused.

"No, I wants Peter," he exclaimed, and struggled down.

"Aye, aye, sir!" returned Peter, and saluted. The infant just as gravely returned the salute with curtesy. It was a daily ceremony. Then Peter's one good arm swung him aloft to the sound shoulder. He beat the horse cruelly about the head, while that thoroughbred, after his kind, bore the punishment unflinchingly. And so—across the sands, and up the shelving cliff to the cottage.

Flooding moonlight silvered the sea two hours later. Mrs. Lee never ventured out into the night air. She was of the generation which believes that with the setting sun bacteria in billions take possession of the atmosphere and constitute a hidden death.

Peter and Margaret walked to the pier. Peter, busy with crowding thoughts, was silent. At the pier foot an old fisherman gave them good-night. Peter did not answer, but Margaret threw an added sweetness into her reply to make up.

At the end of the pier they stood, looking down the pathway of radiance.

"Oh, life can hurt, but it's good, Peter, it's good."

"It's all right," said Peter, loconically. She was going to his head.

"Oh, don't be a bear on a night like this, old thing," she begged. "It's out of the picture."

He turned to her. In the white light her beauty and grace were etherialized.

"You're finding your way back to the old track," he said.

How far she had wandered from that Contentment Road, from which she had vowed she would never stray! There was a hint of feeling in her tone as she replied.

"I'm just at the entrance, Peter, where Difficulty Lane makes the sharp turn. The roads fork there, and it's easy to miss the way."

"Not for you," he said, almost sharply. "It's just a matter of wheeling round the turn. You know the way. Oh, Margaret, don't you remem—!"

He was silent. That way was barred.

Margaret's heart raced. She had a move to make, and it was hard to phrase what she had to say.

"I've discovered—Peter, don't you think that it can be a very lonely road sometimes?"

His voice sounded gruff to his ears, as he made answer. She listened for the reply anxiously. Surely he would take the cue.

"You've got Sir Walter Raleigh," he said, "and no one could be lonely with the young baronite to stir up things."

"You love him, don't you, Peter?" she asked.

"He's a sportsman. If he keeps his course, shouldn't wonder if you make something out of him yet." He was trying to keep his voice light. It only sounded flippant.

"That's just it. Am I to bring him up in England, where his responsibilities are, or in Australia, where life is wider? I'm just wondering whether I am capable of deciding aright."

"But—you wouldn't go back to England!" Peter was aroused by the grim possibility.

"If it were best for the boy. I—want—someone

to help with the responsibility—Peter," she risked. Woman could do no more.

He faced her. In a tide of desire that had been dammed back for years, all his resolutions were swept off. He was Man, and this was Woman, and he had a right to win her if he could.

"Just what do you mean?" he demanded, straitly.

"You are suffering from an aggravated attack of Wisteria to-night, Peter. I'm afraid of you," she countered lightly, but he did not smile in return.

"I have dreamed that some day you would belong to me, Margaret," he said, soberly, but with his eyes filled with a growing excitement. "I simply daren't hope that my dreams will come true. God who knows I love you knows also the height you have to stoop from——"

She laughed joyously.

"Never mind the height, Peter," she whispered. "I've waited ages just to hear you tell me that you love me. Look, I haven't to stoop. I'm only—waiting. And I almost had to ask you to marry me."

"You blessed angel," he said, and caught her to him. He could use the right arm quite effectively.

They passed from the pier when the moon was very low. The fisherman was at work on his nets.

"Fine night, sir an' marm," he called after them. Peter strode back.

"It's a magnificent night, old man," he said, heartily, and the low moon showed that something changed hands.

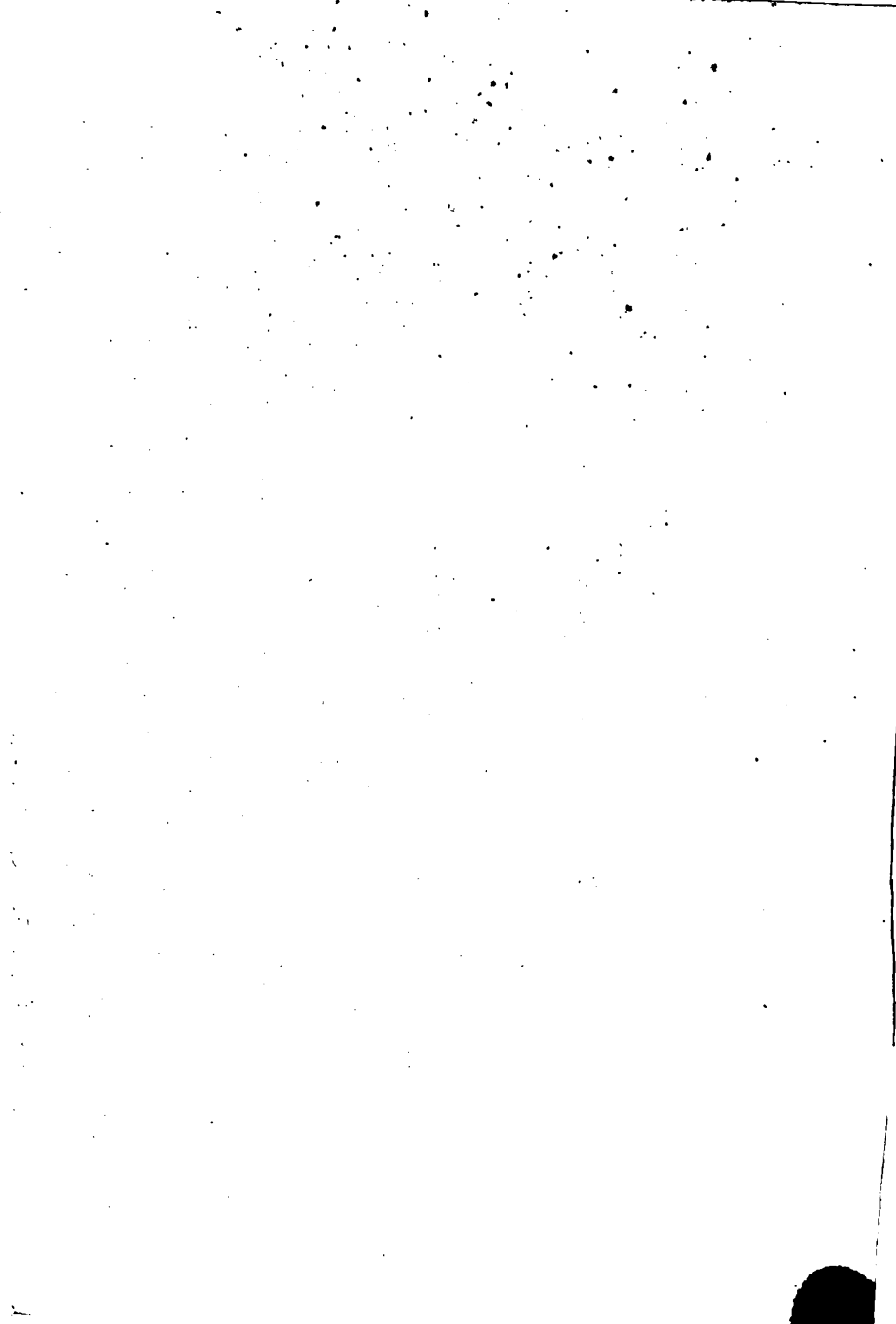
"What did you give him?" asked Margaret.

"Oh, a bit of a present. You see, darling, he thought it was a fine night," said Peter happily.

The fisherman looked at the note he held.

"Strike me!" he said. "A fiver!" And thought it was a finer night than ever.

Margaret and Peter walked slowly on in the moonlight. They had negotiated the sharp turn from Difficulty Lane, and were approaching Number 3 Contentment Road.





03

